Two Girls in a Siege

EDITH C. KENYON

FOUGHT HIS WAY TO THE TOWER-TOP, AND TORE DOWN THE REBEL STANDARD. [*See page* 186.

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TWO GIRLS IN A SIEGE

A Tale of the Great Civil War

FOUNDED UPON FACTS CONTAINED IN OLD BOOKS RELATING TO THE PLACE AND THE PERIOD.

BY

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TWO GIRLS IN A SIEGE

CHAPTER I

SIR NICHOLAS KEMEYS

'And now! O Muse, to sing of one who nobly did his part!
A knightly, valiant gentleman; a noble, generous heart!'
Sir Nicholas Kemeys—OSRIC.

'OH, father! I hate it so! Why am I a girl? If only I were a boy I should like to be with Charles and William at Oxford! They have fine doings!'

'Why, Wild Bird, what's the matter now? Come here, child, and tell me all about it.' As he spoke Sir Nicholas Kemeys held out a kindly hand to his young daughter, who had stolen into the big hall where he was sitting, to pour out her complaint.

The day had been exceedingly hot, but now the sun was setting in the western sky, in a blaze of gold and crimson, while a refreshing breeze from the north was already stirring the drooping foliage outside and creeping into the great house of Cefn

Mably, situated eight miles from Cardiff. Sir Nicholas was just thinking of going out for a walk, when Cecily, his favourite child, appeared, as usual, in trouble—for her ways were not to her mother's liking, and Lady Jane Kemeys prided herself upon being a good disciplinarian.

Cecily clung to her father's hand, and, supported by it, perched herself upon the arm of his chair. She was a slight, dark girl of sixteen, as yet unformed, slim and willowy as a reed, and not beautiful, though she had fine, dark eyes, and an expression of great intelligence.

'It's this, father,' she said, piteously. 'My mother says that I am to finish sewing my sampler to-day. 'Tis in shaded silks on a green ground, and I do not like doing it. I want to be out of doors. The rabbits will be playing under the trees, and the birds will be warbling their Good-night songs, and I want to talk to Gwen Jones, the woodman's granddaughter. She knows all about the birds and animals. Oh, father, cannot I go out?'

Her father shook his head, but his eyes were full of pity. 'Poor Wild Bird!' he said. 'You would make a fine lad! But you must do as your mother wishes. You must obey her, just as I obey the King. We each have to obey.'

'Obey!' cried the girl, rebelliously. 'It is always Obey! I like not the word, and I like not to do it;' and she knit her brows in a frown.

'Tut, tut!' ejaculated her father. 'Now you are quite in the wrong. We are not sent into this world to do as we like. God, Who made us, gave us duties——'

'What duties have *you*, father? You can do just as you like.'

'Can I?' The knight smiled, and then sighed.

'Yes, father. You talk of obeying the King, but he never interferes, or orders you to do things.'

'There is no need for that. He knows that I am ready, and that the motto of my house and of my life is yonder words emblazoned in Latin over the door. You know them, Wild Bird?'

'"God and His grace,"' the girl said, in softened tones. 'Yes, father, I know—I understand. You believe that God set the King over you, therefore you must obey him, and if it were *necessary* you would fight for him till——'

'——death,' said her father, completing the sentence. 'We Kemeyses are made like that. There would be no flinching, no turning aside, if our duty called us out to fight for our King.'

'I could do it, too,' said the girl, in low, resolute tones. 'I also am made like that!' As she spoke her face looked wonderfully like her father's.

'Pooh!' cried Sir Nicholas, with feigned contempt. 'You cannot work a sampler when it comes to you in the way of duty.'

'I can!' protested Cecily, tears welling up in her big eyes.

'You cannot without grumbling.'

'I will grumble no more. I will work the sampler,' said the girl, completely conquered, 'though I wish,' she added, suppressing a sigh, 'that instead of being such poor work it was a big and glorious deed like dying for the King.'

'Do the poor work first, little Wild Bird,' said her father, with infinite tenderness in his deep voice, 'then, when the time comes, you will be ready for the big, brave deeds that you may be called upon to perform.'

And, with that, Sir Nicholas rose, and signing to the girl to go up-stairs, he called out for his hat and stick, which were quickly brought to him by a man-servant in green livery.

Then Sir Nicholas passed through the big hall shaped like the letter T, and went on to the upper lawn. There he stood a moment or two looking around and considering whether he should take his dogs, or walk alone. Choosing the latter alternative, at length, for he had affairs of importance to think over, he crossed the lawn and walked on, past an ancient well and a small lake to his right, until he reached the park.

Herds of deer tossed their antlers, with a startled air, at his approach, but he only glanced at them with pride, and walked on in his stately way. He

was tall, strongly built, and of fine, soldierly bearing—a worthy owner of a noble property.

'See, Gwen, my little dear, there goes Sir Nicholas!' said an old man bent with age, who was crossing the corner of the park, weighed down beneath a huge bundle of sticks. 'Make your curtsy.' He spoke in Welsh, looking as well as he could from under the sticks at the slim figure of his grandchild, a girl of fifteen years of age, who accompanied him.

The pretty, blue-eyed maiden glanced from under her long lashes at the great man as she curtsied low; but, except for a gracious movement of his head, he did not notice them. He was walking on somewhat absently, his mind busy with the political disturbances of the day, with which he had been and was about to be mixed up, and with his sons Charles and William, who were supposed to be pursuing their studies, as became gentlemen and scholars, in the distant University of Oxford.

But in those troublous times, as the knight shrewdly surmised, his sons were far more likely to be joining King Charles's forces, which lay just then at Oxford, ready to fight if need be for royalty, than poring over books for which they had no real liking. In this year, 1643, the country was torn with dissensions—the King fighting against the Parliament, the Parliament against the King; man against man, house against house,

brother against brother waged a cruel and unrelenting warfare. The whole nation was divided into Royalists and Parliamentarians, the excesses of both parties being truly appalling. King Charles himself, by his vacillations, his breaches of faith, and the arrogance fanned by his counsellors, had alienated many of his own followers. Sir Nicholas was vastly troubled on that head. 'The King can do no wrong,' was a favourite saying of his—though perhaps he used the phrase less vehemently in those days when the voice of his tender conscience protested that truth and untruth were the same in each and every one.

'I must see to the defences of the house, and get stores of ammunition together, for there is no telling how soon we may be embroiled,' he said to himself, 'and then I shall have to quit this life of inaction and strike a blow for the King. I will endeavour to raise a thousand men.'

He was still within the great deer park, climbing a hill now, where oak trees stood in groups, like giant sentinels cresting its brow and looking proudly down upon the fertile land. It was a noble property, and the joy of possession shone in its owner's face. He would not like it to suffer devastation in the continuance of the wretched civil war. He blamed himself for not having taken an active part before this in attempting to end the strife.

'Ah! Whom have we here?' asked Sir Nicholas,

stopping short and frowning a little. He was approaching the grand entrance to the park from the village of Maes-y-bryn, when a tall and stalwart stranger advanced to meet him through the large gate.

The new-comer did not flinch; as he doffed his hat he silently regarded Sir Nicholas with a keen, scrutinising glance.

'Whence come you, my friend?' demanded Sir Nicholas. 'You are not a native of Glamorgan?'

'Not I,' answered the stranger; 'I am by birth a Cornishman. My home is on the shore by Tintagel's Hold. You've heard of it, no doubt, sir. Men say King Arthur kept his court there with all his brave knights of the Round Table.'

'Ah, those were stirring times! But why have you come here? Surely, man, 'tis a long way from your own country?'

The man laughed shortly. 'I am a wrestler,' said he. 'I have wrestled with many men. I have gained many a prize for wrestling. I have thrown all the champion wrestlers in our parts.' He drew himself up proudly, then smiled as he looked at Sir Nicholas, measuring his height, breadth, and probable power with a cool, calculating eye. 'One day,' the stranger continued, 'a Welshman took a turn with me, and when I had thrown him—for he was all brag and no muscle—he said, angrily, "You should meet my countryman, Sir Nicholas

Kemeys! He would throw you and hurl you to the ground as one might hurl a reed!" He said this in such a way that I could not forget his words. They were with me in the night-time, in hours of darkness. They were with me in the day-time, as I sat at my meals with Sally, my little daughter, who is all the kith and kin I have. They mocked at me in the silence; they mingled with the conversation of my fellows; they never left me. I could not work; I could not sleep; last of all I could not eat, and, therefore, I broke up my home, and, selling my household goods, and taking passage in a sailing-boat for Cardiff, came here, determined to find Sir Nicholas Kemeys. Now that I have come, say, do you think that he will condescend to wrestle with me? Will he do it?' The speaker's eyes flashed as he put the question.

Sir Nicholas smiled. 'Marry!' said he; 'methinks that he of whom the Welshman spoke will wrestle with you. I am Sir Nicholas Kemeys.'

'Ay, I thought as much,' muttered the Cornishman.

'Off with your doublet! Take that place on the sward at your right hand. Now' (Sir Nicholas threw off his velvet and satin doublet as he spoke), 'hurl me on it if you can, and show me your Cornish skill.'

The two men began to wrestle in terrible earnest, making feints and fencing as their skill and experi-

ence suggested, and then, locked in a mighty grip, they swayed first on one side, then on another, well matched and about equal in power.

'Ay, but 'tis terrible! God in mercy help Sir Nicholas!' whispered a childish voice in Welsh at the other side of a huge boulder near the gate, where Gwen Jones was crouching and trembling as she looked on. After her grandfather had taken his sticks into the low, thatched hovel they called home, she had stolen out and run nimbly after Sir Nicholas, in order to get one more look at her hero, and she crept up to the gate in time to discover him struggling with a big stranger. Cowering behind the boulder, terrified and unstrung, powerless to help him, tears streaming from her eyes, poor Gwen agonised over the danger, as she thought it, of Sir Nicholas. 'Oh, God, send an angel down to save him as Thou didst save Daniel in the den of lions!' she prayed, fervently. 'Save him! Save him now!'

Sir Nicholas had never wrestled with so strong a man before. He was obliged to put forth all his strength.

The man from Cornwall felt he was overmatched. His muscles stood out like iron bands as he strained them to their utmost, with eyes starting from his head. For some time he was able at least to stand on the defensive. But then, suddenly, his attention was diverted by hearing a pathetic cry, 'He'll kill

Sir Nicholas! He'll kill Sir Nicholas! Oh, spare him! Spare him, please!'

At the same moment the knight caught the Cornishman off his guard, raised him in his iron grasp and flung him on the grass.

Completely vanquished, the stranger slowly rose to his feet, to find Sir Nicholas donning his doublet and shaking with laughter as he did so.

'Here, my man,' cried he, 'here is golden salve for your bruises!' and, with that, he tossed his purse into the other's hands, and then, carelessly nodding, turned and strode down the hill.

The Cornishman scowled after him, holding the purse gingerly, and looking as if he would like to fling it at his head. Then, thinking better of it, he turned away, muttering, 'I never saw such a man in all my life, and I believe I never shall.'

CHAPTER II

POOR GWEN'S PETITION

'Brave men are brave from the very first.'
CORNEILLE.

'GWEN! Gwen!' called a low voice softly. 'Gwen!'

'Yes, mistress.' Gwen came to the door of the hovel in which she lived with her grandparents. The sun was shining brightly, and she shaded her eyes with one small brown hand in order to look at the young lady who sat on her pony bareback at the door.

Cecily usually rode like that when she came out in a hurry and could slip away unseen by the grooms, who had strict orders not to allow her to ride without a saddle, or go anywhere unattended.

'What was that you saw my father doing one day when you hid yourself and watched him on the hill by the park gate?' she demanded.

'Oh, mistress, how do you know about it?' faltered Gwen, looking frightened.

'Our old nurse told me something about it. She is one of your grandmothers, and your other

grandmother told her,' explained Cecily, slipping down from her pony's back and catching hold of Gwen's hand in her eagerness to know all that she had to tell.

'I dare not tell you here,' Gwen whispered. 'Grannie Jones would beat me did she think I ran after Sir Nicholas to spy on him.'

'But you did not do that! You are no spy!' declared Cecily, with faith in the poor girl whom she liked so much.

'No. I meant no harm. But he is so great and so splendid—and grandfather and I saw a strange man hanging about near the park gate, and I thought—I was afraid,' Gwen broke off, glancing fearfully over her shoulder.

'Gwen! Gwen! You lazy girl! Come back to your work,' a weak old voice cried from within the house.

'Coming, grannie,' Gwen replied. 'You see how it is, Mistress Cecily,' she continued.

'I will go and speak to her,' Cecily said at once. 'Just hold Rufus, will you, please?'

'Who is there?' the querulous voice from within was saying as Cecily entered.

'It is I, Mrs. Jones,' the girl answered, speaking Welsh perfectly, to the old woman's delight. 'How is your rheumatism to-day?'

'Mistress Cecily, indeed I am glad to see you!' cried the poor old creature, who was lying in a big

old four-post bed, blackened by smoke and age. 'It has been a bad night and a bad day with me, but now the little angel from the house has come and all is sunshine.'

Cecily laughed. 'I like you to call me that,' she said. 'Do you know, Mrs. Jones, an angel is a messenger, and I have brought you a message.'

'From your mother, Lady Jane?' asked the old woman, eagerly.

'No,' Cecily answered. 'But it is from myself—from my own heart.' And she smiled brilliantly.

'Then, mistress, it will be good, like you. Indeed it will!' the other exclaimed. 'Speak, mistress, and tell me all.'

Cecily put a silver coin into her hand. 'I want you to lend me Gwen,' she said, 'for an hour or so. That is my message. Will you do it?"

'Willingly, willingly! Bless you, my little lady! What you have given me will buy good food, and you are welcome to Gwen. Take her away for all day if you like.'

'I shall not require her so long. She shall return in time to get your dinner ready,' Cecily said, cheerfully. 'Good-bye, Mrs. Jones. Think about me when you are downhearted.'

'Yes, yes; I'll think about you, sweet lady, and pray for blessings on your head!' cried the old woman, with fervour.

'Come on, Gwen,' Cecily said, jumping on to her

pony's back, and making him walk slowly in order to keep pace with the girl.

They passed along on a bridle-path leading through the wood, and were soon deep in conversation. Graphically, and with much feeling, Gwen described the scene she had witnessed on the hill in the park when Sir Nicholas wrestled with the big stranger and overcame him. Superstitious, like many of her race, Gwen confessed to more than half suspecting that the stranger was no human being, but an emissary of Satan's who had come to earth in order to fight good Sir Nicholas.

Cecily laughed at the idea. 'It is absurd,' she said, 'and quite unnecessary to think that, for my father's wrestling is famous, and I can well believe that a professional wrestler would travel far to wrestle with him. Don't you know, Gwen, that my father is called "The Lion of Glamorgan"? He is the bravest of all the brave men in our big county. And did you really think that he was in danger?' she inquired, with some reproach in her young voice.

'I was afraid,' said Gwen, shaking her tangled locks; 'I was afraid, but I prayed hard for him all the time.'

'Good Gwen!' cried Cecily, stooping forward to lay her hand on the other's shoulder. 'I believe you love us all,' she added.

'Yes, mistress; indeed I do. People talk about

the King and about Cromwell, and the Parliament and the dangers and troubles of the times, but poor Gwen thinks only of her Mistress Cecily, and Sir Nicholas and Lady Jane, and the young gentlemen and young ladies at the house. They are what she cares for most, and for them—to save them, if they were in trouble, she would die!' Her musical voice was full of devotion.

'I know it, Gwen. You are true as steel, and brave—oh, there is no one braver!' Cecily said, and now her hand was clasping the other's as if she were a friend.

Gwen bent her head to kiss the young lady's hand. Then she said, 'People say the war will come here, and that brave Sir Nicholas will be in the thick of it.'

'Yes, I think so,' Cecily rejoined, with flashing eyes.

'And they say your big house, Cefn Mably, may be besieged,' continued the poor girl.

'Yes, that is likely enough if there is a battle near here.'

'And I am so afraid——'

'What? You afraid? Fie, Gwen!' interrupted Cecily.

'I am afraid only of one thing, and that is that, if the fighting comes here and the house is surrounded, I may be outside, and not inside with all of you.'

'But, surely, all you poor folk who live on my father's land will come into the house for shelter.'

'It isn't shelter I am wanting,' Gwen replied, with dignity, as she raised her head high. 'It is to be near you and to help you that I want. Oh, mistress,' she burst out, 'couldn't you find a place for me as servant in Cefn Mably? Then I should be there ready when the evil day comes.'

Cecily looked at her doubtfully. Certainly Gwen, in her short and somewhat ragged petticoats, with tangled tawny hair and bare feet, looked extremely unlike the trim maid-servants in her home. But Gwen's heart was good and loyal. Surely there was the making of a faithful servant in her.

'I will speak to my mother,' Cecily said at length, 'and will beg her to allow you to come and learn to be a servant.'

'Thank you, mistress. I wish I could be your maid,' struck in Gwen.

Cecily laughed quite merrily. 'Why, Gwen,' she exclaimed, 'you do not even know how to do your own hair, so how could you dress mine?'

Gwen hung her head. 'I will make my hair clean and smooth like yours,' she said. 'I will do anything—anything if only I may come to the big house and learn how to live there as a servant.'

'Well, I will ask my mother,' Cecily repeated, 'and, meantime, you must begin to keep yourself so clean and neat that you may be ready when the

time comes.' It seemed to Cecily as she spoke that she was repeating words that she had heard somewhere recently, and it was not until her horse was bearing her swiftly homewards, after parting from Gwen, that she remembered her father had bidden her do the small duties well in order to be ready when opportunities for greater usefulness occurred.

And Gwen in her grandparents' hovel set to work to reform her outward appearance, while within her heart she was full of loyal thoughts. And, being intensely religious, as are so many of the Welsh, she prayed very earnestly that God would give her His Holy Spirit to make her good and wise, in order that she might know how best to serve her beloved Mistress Cecily, and become a worthy member of the household of Sir Nicholas Kemeys.

CHAPTER III

A GALLANT RESCUER

'Cowards are cruel, but the brave
Love mercy and delight to save.'

GAY.

A YEAR afterwards, in a large old country house some twenty miles away from Cefn Mably, a beautiful and high-born girl, the daughter of a baronet named Sir Lewis Mansell, was living quietly alone with a few old servants, while her father was away at the seat of war.

He was a man whose loyalty to his king was as the very breath of his life. Nothing that he could command was ever allowed to stand in the way of the wishes of King Charles; and when the war broke out no power on earth could keep him from his monarch's side. Even his motherless daughter, the sole surviving member of his family, was left alone, with dependents, in order that he himself might be with his king.

Blanche submitted without a murmur. She, too, was loyal-hearted, and brave enough to have no fears for herself; only for her father she feared sometimes, when tidings reached her of ruthless

slaughter and of knights and men left dying on the battle-field.

News came to her also of the surrender and occupation of divers Welsh castles and houses, but she trusted that her own beloved home would be spared, and, being a Christian maid, daily and almost hourly her prayers were offered for the preservation of King Charles and her father and his gallant friends, and the restoration of peace throughout the land.

Hers was a very quiet life until, one day, Hugh Reese, a Roundhead living in North Glamorganshire, whom the war had brought into the neighbourhood, rode up with a small company of men, and demanded board and lodging for an indefinite time.

The demand was refused by Blanche, who gave orders that the doors were to be closed to the rebels, as she scrupled not to call them.

Laughing derisively, Reese burst open the doors and forced the frightened servants to give him and his men food, and prepare them sleeping apartments.

After having eaten and drunk abundantly, he sent a message to the lady of the house requesting, or rather commanding, the favour of her company.

She was not to be found, and it turned out that, while feasting was going on down-stairs, she and

a few old servants had effected their escape through a bedroom window and down an old tree leaning against the house, and, having by some means obtained horses from the stables, they had quitted the place, leaving no traces behind them.

Reese was enraged. Already he had boasted to his men that, not content with seizing the house, he intended to marry beautiful Miss Mansell and settle down in her home for the future; and, lo! even while he was boasting and talking about this, the lady and her servants had decamped and got away from him.

'To horse! to horse!' he cried. 'We will follow and overtake them.'

But his men only laughed, saying they were in no state to travel further that day. The fact was that both master and men were more than half intoxicated, and, seeing that it was so, Reese sat down again to drink until far into the night.

Meanwhile Blanche and her servants made considerable progress. It was their wish to get to Cefn Mably, for Blanche's father and Sir Nicholas Kemeys were very old friends, and she and the young Kemeyses were on quite intimate terms. With Charles Kemeys especially Blanche was particularly friendly, and indeed almost more than that, for he had paid her some attentions, and already they thought of one another most affectionately. The thought of him and of his father gave her

comfort as she fled from her old home in the direction of theirs.

About half the distance had been traversed when night came on, and darkness unrelieved by any moonlight, or even—as it was very cloudy—by the light of the stars.

Having no lamps, nor any means of providing any artificial light, the little party of fugitives came to a standstill.

'We shall have to go somewhere for the night,' Miss Mansell said, 'if it be only to a farmhouse.'

Accordingly, one or two of her servants separated from her and went across some fields to a farmhouse. Fortunately, the people who lived there were kindly folk, who knew and respected Sir Lewis Mansell; and, though they took neither side in the war, they cordially offered hospitality to his daughter and her servants.

Blanche thankfully rested at the farmhouse that night, and on the morrow, after thanking her host and hostess, pursued her journey in the bright light of a summer day.

Alas! they had not travelled far before a cloud of dust and the noise of horses' hoofs and loud voices betokened that mounted men were following.

Turning aside into a by-lane, dismounting, and hoping that the trees and hedges would conceal their presence, were of no avail, for Reese and his men quickly surrounded them.

'Now, my lady, I have you!' Reese was exclaiming, when, to Blanche's inexpressible relief, a party of Cavaliers came dashing up, with the cry, 'In the King's name, surrender!'

A fight ensued, which was quickly terminated by the abject flight of Reese and what was left of his men.

Blanche's servants were all more or less injured and full of their own woes, but she herself was unhurt.

The leader of the rescuing party was a young Cavalier of striking appearance. Fair of complexion, tall and well built, he wore a peaked beard, small upturned moustache and long hair. Moreover, he was attired in a buff coat, richly laced and embroidered with gold; round his waist was a broad satin scarf tied in a large bow behind the hip, as was the fashion of Cavaliers in those days. His clothes, however, were dusty, and his hair untidy and dishevelled. His horse, too, bore traces of a rapid journey across-country, as did also those of his followers.

As Blanche Mansell raised her winsome face, and, looking up at him, met his dark-blue eyes, a rich warm blush mounted to it. Holding out her hand, she exclaimed, 'Charles!'

Taking her small hand in both his, the Cavalier rejoined, 'Blanche! Dear Blanche Mansell!'

'How am I to thank you?' she said.

'I need no thanks,' he returned. 'I was on my way to your house. Your father sent me, for word was brought him by one of his dependents that the Roundheads were going to try to seize the house. I asked for and obtained the King's permission to come to you.'

While he talked Blanche was kneeling by the side of one of her servants, endeavouring to stanch the blood flowing from a wound in his shoulder. With deft fingers she removed the clothing, and bound up the wound with her own scarf.

The young Cavalier stood looking down on her with the most intense admiration. 'Blanche,' he said in his own mind, 'shall be my wife. There is no other woman in all the world like her.'

The groans of the other servants, however, called his attention to them, and he quickly ordered one of his followers to ride to the nearest farmhouse to get a waggon, or some litters, in which they could be conveyed thither.

'Tell them that I, Sir Charles Kemeys'—he had recently been knighted by the King—'will pay them liberally for all and everything,' he added.

Then followed many minutes which seemed like hours to Blanche and her servants, as they waited anxiously for help, hampered most of all by the need of water, which could not be found anywhere, in spite of Sir Charles's men being sent hither and thither in search of it.

At last, however, men on foot with litters arrived, and the wounded were tenderly lifted and carried to the farmhouse.

Blanche would have gone with them, but her servants entreated her not to do so, lest she should again fall into the hands of Hugh Reese. Sick and wounded as they were, they begged Sir Charles to take her to his father's house, declaring that they would not rest themselves if she were not there in safety.

The young man insisted upon her agreeing to this, and, very much against her inclination, Blanche parted from her wounded servants, with the promise that she would have them sent for as soon as they were well enough to be moved to Cefn Mably.

Sir Charles's followers were obliged to assist in carrying the invalids to the farmhouse, so the knight alone remained with Blanche. As their horses were wounded they had to proceed on foot.

A solitary horseman overtook them presently, calling out a cheery greeting as he passed.

Sir Charles recognised his voice, and called out, 'Rowland Rowlands of Cardiff!'

'What, is it you?' rejoined the man, heartily. He had a round, good-natured face, and was dressed as a Roundhead. 'Well, Sir Charles,' he continued, 'I heard you were knighted, but 'tis a pity you side with the King, whose day is over, and with

the Pope, who will do you no good. However, it cannot be helped. We do not all think alike. But I must warn you and the lady you are escorting that there are many men of my persuasion about here just now. And you are dreadfully conspicuous on the high road.'

'What am I to do?' Sir Charles said, with impatience. 'We must get home to Cefn Mably.'

'Between you and your home are many Parliamentarians; for, let me tell you, my comrades are all on the high road leading from here to Cefn Mably. They are on the look-out for you, thinking you will be sure to turn up there. They are ready for any mischief, especially as they know that they may soon have to quit this part of the country, where Cardiff is now our only stronghold.'

'Cardiff? Has Cardiff fallen into the hands of the Parliamentarians?' asked Sir Charles, aghast at the thought.

'Yes. It is supposed to have been taken by sea, by Swanley, the Vice-Admiral, you know, who takes so many seaside places. I will not tell you how much truth there is in that. But it is in the hands of Parliamentarians, and I and others of our persuasion have been enrolled to assist the new Governor, for Cardiff's Roundhead garrison have as much as they can possibly do to hold the place without venturing outside, being greatly harassed by King's men all around.'

'To think that all this time I did not know!' exclaimed Sir Charles. He was amazed at the realisation that he had been so absorbed with Blanche and her dangers, and the first love of his life, that he had been blind and deaf to all else but that and how to secure her safety.

'Hark!' cried Blanche. 'Dear Charles, is not that the sound of horses approaching?'

'It is!'

'What shall we do? Oh, Charles!' She raised her quivering face to his.

CHAPTER IV

CARRIED OFF BY THE ENEMY

'Nothing can be more contrary to nature, to reason, to religion, than cruelty. Hence an inhuman man is generally considered as a monster. Such monsters have existed, and the heart almost bleeds at the recital of the cruel acts such have been guilty of. It teaches us, however, what human nature is when left to itself.'—BUCK.

'BLANCHE, my beloved, we must pass through this gap in the hedge and cross the field. Then, if we go down to the river, we can reach a place I know of whence we shall be able to get home safely.'

'Yes. Make the gap a little wider, please,' said Blanche, looking at it timidly.

Sir Charles made it wider and higher. He did more. He went through it himself to test the passage, then he came back and gently lifted his beloved until her feet rested on the broken-down hedge. Thence it was easy enough for her to jump on to the ground beyond.

Her cavalier followed her in a moment, and, taking hold of each other's hands, they ran across the field down to the nearest bank of the river Rhymney.

'It is somewhere near here,' said Charles, 'amongst the reeds growing above some rocks—down amongst the rocks is the entrance.'

'Of what are you speaking?' asked Blanche.

'My dearest, I shall have to impart to you something which we Kemeyses have always withheld from the outside world.'

'It will be quite safe with me, Charles. I shall tell no one.'

'I know that, dear,' he rejoined, tenderly. 'This is it. There is a secret trap-door amongst the reeds and rocks down by this river side. It opens into a subterranean passage communicating with our house at Cefn Mably.'

'Oh, Charles!' exclaimed Blanche, delightedly. 'The very thing! Do you think we can go by it to your house?'

'Ay, ay. I have trodden that way once with my father. If I could only find the opening I could manage the rest. I believe the trap-door is further on. Will you stay here a minute or two whilst I go and see?'

'I would rather accompany you.'

'My dear Blanche, you cannot. It is very rough walking here, and I may have to retrace my steps, for the place may be in the other direction. Wait where you are until I return to you.'

'Oh, Charles, do not leave me!'

The pitiful little cry which escaped from

Blanche's lips haunted Charles afterwards, when, having lost her, he would have given all that he possessed to have stayed by her side. Now, however, he simply said, 'Be brave, dearest, and wait until I return to you.'

By the light of the young moon Blanche saw her lover disappear, with feelings of great misgiving. She sat down disconsolately upon a big boulder by the river side. It was very lonely there. The water flowed placidly by with scarcely a murmur. A corncrake in the field behind uttered its mournful cry again and again, with dreary persistence. A dog howled somewhere on the other side of the river. From the distance came subdued sounds of horses' hoofs, mens' voices, the clashing of steel, and—further off still—in the direction of Llandaff a bell rang out in the stillness.

What was happening? she wondered. Where was her father? It was good of him to send Sir Charles Kemeys to her assistance when he apprehended danger for her, but surely any other father would have come himself to look after the welfare of his only child. Yet Blanche would not allow herself to blame him even in thought, knowing as she did his extraordinary attachment to his King, and how he always put his monarch's welfare far above any consideration of himself, or his family. But, of course, that habit of his left her very lonely,

and made her yearn sometimes for the mother whom she had lost by death.

How long Charles was! Surely he had not stepped into one of those ugly holes among the rocks! What should she do if he never returned? What could she do all alone?

Clasping her hands, she strained her eyes in the attempt to see his dark form by the river side. But in vain. No one was there. Should she go to look for him? No. He had bidden her wait there. She would obey him.

She sat still, leaning her head upon her hand, and beginning to think of her servants, those faithful men who, mindful of their promise to her father, had done their best to guard her. Were they recovering from their wounds, and when well would they return home, or follow her to Cefn Mably? She remembered not having left them any instructions.

How very long Charles was! Would that dog never cease howling? Was that a boat approaching in the gloom? Yes, it was; for now the soft beating of oars upon the water was plainly to be heard.

Oh, why did not Charles come back? There were men in the boat. One, two, three figures. Two were rowing, one sat in the stern with his cloak folded about him. Blanche could see them all quite plainly now. But, why at a gesture from

the man who sat apart, did the oarsmen stop rowing? Why was the boat turning? They were coming to the bank! They must have seen her—and indeed her figure silhouetted against the sky was quite conspicuous.

They had fastened the painter of the boat and were getting out—at least the man wrapped in a cloak was. He was coming towards her!

What could she do? Should she run away in the direction taken by Charles? That would be foolish; a man could so soon overtake her, and it would betray fear.

She sat on, looking with dread at the approaching stranger.

'I crave your pardon, madam,' he said, ceremoniously, lifting his hat with a profound bow, 'but may I inquire why you sit there?' A note of mockery was in his tone.

'You may,' answered Blanche, slightly inclining her head.

'Then will you answer?'

She did not speak.

'Are you some goddess of the night?' he questioned. Now there was disdain as well as mockery in his tones, and he laid his hand familiarly on her shoulder.

Oh, why did not Charles come? That dog in the distance had ceased barking, only the dismal croaking of the corncrake sounded in the silence

that followed. For she could not, would not answer this man.

'Ho! So you will not speak, fair mistress? Very well; we will take steps to make you. Morgan! Jones!' he called to the men in the boat, 'come here!' Then he added to Blanche as the men were coming, 'I suppose you are a Royalist?'

She made no answer. Her eyes were fixed pitifully upon the point where she had seen Charles disappear.

The men from the boat came up and spoke in Welsh to him who had called them. Blanche did not listen to them. The man's hand was on her shoulder. She felt paralysed, unable to think what she should do; and unable to do anything. Oh, where was Charles?

''Tis clear,' said the man who held her, ''tis clear you are here waiting for some one. Is it not so?'

Blanche did not answer.

'Do you know who I am?' said the other. 'I am an *aide-de-camp* of the present Governor of Cardiff, and have great influence with him. If you do not reply to my questions I shall convey you to his presence, and you will have to answer him.'

The girl shuddered. She had no respect for the present Governor of Cardiff Castle, a creature of

Admiral Swanley's, who had been put in the place of a far worthier man. At the thought of being carried off to him as a prisoner she turned very faint, and her resolution faltered.

'If, sir, you will please to remove your hand, I will endeavour to make an answer,' she murmured.

He laughed, but withdrew his hand.

'You ask my name?' said Blanche. 'It is Mansell. I am the daughter of Sir Lewis Mansell.'

'What? That red-hot King's man? You his daughter? Well, 'tis rare luck indeed to have secured the daughter of such a rabid Royalist! With you in our power we may be able to make him come over to our side!'

'You do not know Sir Lewis Mansell, if you think anything will induce him to do that,' replied Blanche, with spirit.

'Well, we shall see. Ho! You fellows, convey this lady to the boat.'

It was in vain Blanche besought him to be merciful and leave her where she was. It was in vain she resisted with all her feeble strength. She was as a child in the arms of the strong men who lifted her from the ground and carried her to the boat, where they made her sit between them, each holding her with one iron hand whilst rowing with the other.

They passed slowly down the river. The dog began to bark again in the distance. The corn-crake still uttered its weird, sepulchral cry. Only the girl sitting on the boulder was there no longer, and Sir Charles Kemeys, returning, looked for her in vain.

'Blanche! Blanche dearest! Blanche, I've found the place,' he began, and then stopped short in consternation at finding she was not there.

'Blanche! Blanche!' he called, repeatedly, at the risk of being heard by other ears.

But there came no answer, and almost beside himself with grief, he looked carefully over the ground where he had left her.

What was that? A torn fragment of the lace that trimmed her dress. There must have been a struggle—a seizure of her person.

Why, oh! why had he been so foolish as to stay away so long, trying to open the secret trap-door, the spring of which had got strained, instead of returning at once to take Blanche to it?

'Fool that I was!' he cried. But only the night wind moaned; he was alone.

Blanche was nowhere to be found, although he searched for hours he could find no further trace of her.

He was almost captured himself by Roundheads, when, in his grief, he ventured upon the high road to Cefn Mably, and it was only by lying all

IT WAS IN VAIN SHE RESISTED WITH ALL HER FEEBLE STRENGTH.

his length in a ditch that he was able to escape their observation.

It was early morning when wet, dishevelled, wild-eyed, he made his way, at length, through the secret passage to his home.

CHAPTER V

A TRYING TIME

'Live a life of truest breath,
And teach true life to fight with mortal wrongs.'
TENNYSON.

'I WILL never marry you! Never! I would rather die! You are most cruel to persecute me thus!'

Hugh Reese laughed insolently. He was standing talking to Blanche Mansell in a cell in Cardiff Castle, where she had been kept in close confinement for several days since her capture on the banks of the Rhymney.

The Governor of Cardiff Castle *pro tem* was, as we have seen, a creature of Vice-Admiral Swanley's, placed there for no merit of his own, but simply because it pleased his patron to reward him in that way. Reese himself was but a subordinate of the Governor's—for the time being,—he was quite prepared to change sides whenever the Royalist party became again in the ascendant. He and his master were by no means representative Roundheads. They were not godly Puritans, who in fighting deemed themselves merely the

instruments of the Lord, bent upon doing His will in warring against an incompetent and unprincipled ruler and his wretched government. It was said that Swanley, assisted by these two men, had on one occasion thrown overboard some poor Irishmen captured at sea. (Later, in order to punish them, the Welsh gentry and common people rose as one man.) Now, safe in the stronghold of Cardiff Castle, the newly appointed Governor and his creature Reese worked many a villainy unchecked. Originally belonging to some of the adventurers and outlaws gathered together by Swanley for his piracy and sea villainies, they were not by any means to be compared with the honest men they pretended to govern, or against whom they fought.

It was an evil night for poor Blanche Mansell when she fell into their clutches. Ever since then fear and trembling had been her portion. The very worst she thought had come upon her when Hugh Reese returned to the garrison, and began to woo her with wild, impassioned ardour. Her loveliness and charms, he declared, had enslaved his heart. He offered his hand in marriage, vowing he would take no refusal, no refusal at all. Her brave persistency in resisting his advances making him suspect a rival, he placed a female spy—a tool of his—near her person night and day. From this woman he learnt that in her sleep the

captive lady sometimes cried out for Charles Kemeys—'dear Charles Kemeys'—to take pity upon her and come to rescue her, who loved him dearly.

This angered Hugh Reese immensely. Sir Nicholas Kemeys and his son were busy raising a thousand men in the country around for the King's cause. Sir Charles Gerard, having conquered Carmarthen and fortified it for the King, was reported to be on his way to Glamorgan, and the Kemeyses, together with other prominent Welsh gentry, were doing their utmost to prepare to assist him to oust the Roundheads from their last stronghold in the extreme south of South Wales. They were, therefore, a thorn in the side of the Cardiff garrison, and that one of them should be a rival lover was to Reese extremely exasperating.

''Tis a pity that you cannot love me, Mistress Mansell,' said he, taking a seat near her, and endeavouring to touch her hand, which she held back, 'for great harm will fall upon the head of an unlucky friend of yours unless you do.'

'Is that a threat?' asked Blanche, haughtily, showing no sign of fear, though her heart beat fast.

'Call it what you please,' he answered. 'I know this, that if you do not marry me that precious lover of yours, Sir Charles Kemeys—you start!—Sir Charles Kemeys I repeat, he of Cefn

Mably, shall die.' This he said deliberately; his small eyes watching her keenly.

Blanche's face became still paler.

'How can you say that?' she faltered. 'You have no power over life and death.'

'Sir Charles Kemeys is in our hands—he is, in fact, a prisoner of war,' cried the other, with apparent exultation. 'Even now he is lying in a dungeon in this same castle of Cardiff. To-morrow on the gallows he will die——'

He was interrupted by a cry so bitter and so full of terror-stricken anguish that even he felt qualms of conscience.

'You can save him,' he said, quickly. 'Dear Blanche,' and again he sought to take her hand, whilst an oily softness came into his voice, 'you alone can save him.'

'How? How?' She looked appealingly into the hard, cruel-looking face before her.

Reese took her hand, her most unwilling hand, in his, and pressed it tenderly. 'My dear, I love you,' he said. 'Nay, do not wince. If you will try ever so little to return my love, if you will promise to marry me, Sir Charles Kemeys shall live. Nay, more, on the day on which we are married he shall be liberated.'

'Oh, but I cannot! I cannot marry you!' sobbed the poor girl, distractedly. 'I cannot!'

An ugly look came into the other's face.

'Charles Kemeys will hang upon our gallows to-morrow morning!' said he, and turned as if to leave the cell.

'Oh, stay! Stay!' sobbed Blanche, desperately. 'One moment! You say you love me, will you hear my prayer?' She fell on her knees, raising her clasped hands towards him. 'Save his life!'

''Tis you who can do that, for I will if——'

'Yes, but be generous, save it without the heavy price you ask.'

'Heavy, do you call it?' he asked.

'Yes, most heavy. I cannot pay it. But oh, be generous! Be generous,' she repeated.

Hugh Reese, looking on her, felt more enraged than ever.

'No! No!' he cried, passionately. 'Unless I hear you promise to marry me—unless I hear it before night the man shall hang on our gallows on the morn.'

And with that he went out, slamming the door of the cell behind him and locking it with unnecessary noise.

Blanche was now very unhappy. Her tortured mind dwelt on the woes and threatened death of her beloved. She imagined that she could see him lying in a dungeon somewhere below, in that very castle in which she sat like a caged bird deprived of freedom, and thought how wretched he would be at the ignominy of his fate, and how he would

chafe at the confinement. What would be his feelings when his jailer told him he must prepare to die to-morrow? And on the gallows, too? Despair would be his portion—horror and despair.

And she might save him. It was in her power, by submitting to her imperious captor, and giving up her sweet life to his keeping, to save the man she loved from a truly awful fate. She could do it, and no one else. And, after all, it did not so much matter what became of her if Charles were happy. If he died she would be most miserable; if he lived she could bear misery for his sake.

She was in poor health; her spirits subdued, her faith weakened and her very soul sickened by captivity, lack of air, and meagre diet. No one was at hand to advise her. What should she do? 'I must sacrifice myself,' she thought, 'for him I love.'

Reese did not leave her long to think it over. 'I must press you for an answer now—immediately,' he said, returning.

'Oh, but you must wait, please! I cannot answer you now, not just now,' she pleaded. 'Give me a little time. Give me at least till evening.'

'No, you must promise now,' said he. 'To-night—to-night there will be other things to do.'

'But—but—but——' she sobbed, putting up both hands to her face, like a little child, and crying as if her heart would break.

'Now, or never! It is the only chance you can ever have of saving him. And, look here, mistress, if you do not——' He leaned forward, whispering his dreadful threat against Sir Charles's life.

Half swooning, Blanche was about to consent when, happily for her, no less a person than the Governor of the Castle appeared. He was in a towering rage about something Reese had been doing, and began to upbraid him in loud tones.

Bullies being always cowards, Reese forthwith cringed and winced before his chief, and, at the latter's bidding, followed him from the cell.

Left alone, Blanche thanked God for the respite, and, taking courage from the thought that the interruption at the critical moment was providential, she prayed earnestly that He would save her from the truly perilous position in which she stood.

And, as she prayed, her heart grew lighter, and her faith in God, which had grown weak, became strong again, so that she wondered how she could have doubted for a moment, and more, continued day after day and night after night in fear and dread. She had no fear now, and, as she rose from her knees, she said to herself, 'Greater is He Who is with me than all who are against me, and I will not fear what man can do unto me.'

CHAPTER VI

BLANCHE'S ESCAPE FROM PRISON

'The joy of liberty can only be completely understood by those who have lost it for a time.'—E. C. K.

BLANCHE had not promised to marry Hugh Reese. She was still free. That was a great matter for thankfulness, and she soon found another, for, when her jailer brought in her meagre dinner, she plucked up courage to ask him if Sir Charles Kemeys was a prisoner in the castle.

'No, no!' exclaimed the man, surprised out of his usual cautious silence by the question. 'The Lion of Glamorgan would indeed make things hot for us did we touch but a hair of his son's head. Who are you, lady, that do not know the power of the Kemeyses here in South Wales? I should think,' he went on, with that boundless faith in the grand old family shared by nearly all his fellow-countrymen in South Wales—'I should think this Civil War would be over if the Kemeyses were imprisoned or slain.'

Blanche's relief was great, but there was no opportunity for her to say anything, as the man,

recollecting that he was not allowed to talk to the prisoner, hastened away, banging the door after him and jingling his keys loudly as he locked it.

'Reese lied to me about Charles,' Blanche said to herself. 'He is not a prisoner here, and the statement that he was in danger of being killed was wholly untrue—the entire story was a tissue of lies told me by that wicked wretch for his own ends; therefore no power on earth can induce me to consent to marry Hugh Reese. And, though in prison, I am free, and my dear Charles is at liberty; and I know that, if only they hear of my whereabouts, he and his father will leave no stone unturned to effect my rescue. How highly that man spoke of the power of the Kemeyses. He seemed to think no one could withstand them. Any day—any day they may come. Oh, how I thank God!'

She was so happy that, presently, she began to sing, in her sweet soprano voice, the grand old prison-song—

> 'Glory and honour and praise,
> To Thee, our Redeemer and King:
> To Whom little children sang lays,
> To Whom our hosannas we bring;'

and so on until, in triumph, her glad tones rang out in the last verse—

> 'Fragrant to Thee was their praise,
> Oh, smile on the offering we bring!
> Thy joy is in all pleasant lays,
> Thou blessed and all gracious King!'

Blanche remembered that those words, sung by Bishop Theodulph of Orleans in his prison in the eighth century, had touched the heart of the great Charlemagne's imperial son, so that the captive was released after his song.

'May it be so now,' she said to herself, with that unlifting of the heart which makes of words a prayer.

Soon afterwards the jailer's wife entered the cell, and, looking at Blanche, with unusual compassion, she said, 'Lady, I heard you sing, and it reminded me of the singing of my daughter who is dead. For her sake, for the sake of my dear girl, I bring you comfort——' She paused, looking timidly around, as though in fear lest she should have been followed.

'There is no one here,' Blanche said, in her sweet, low tones. 'Pray tell me what you can to comfort me.'

'It is only this,' returned the other, hurriedly. 'An attempt is being made for your deliverance.'

'My deliverance? God be thanked!' ejaculated the prisoner.

'Yes. Nothing is settled yet. But it is more a question of money than anything else. Those who want to save you are rich, and those who detain you here desire to secure as much as possible of their money in case they consent to release you.'

'I understand,' said Blanche, 'and I thank you for telling me.'

'You will not betray me to my husband?' asked the woman, with anxiety.

'Certainly not. I am most grateful to you,' Blanche said, with feeling.

'He said that I was not to tell you—but your song—so like my daughter's singing—and you much the same age—and innocent—quite innocent of any fault—I could not help it,' faltered the woman.

Blanche took her hand. 'You are very good and kind,' she said. 'I shall always remember and love you for it.'

The woman hurried away, being fearful of discovery, for it was not the usual time for visiting the cell.

Blanche was once more alone, but now more than ever hope was in her heart, and she believed that God had heard her prayers, and was going to deliver her from prison.

'I must be patient,' she said to herself, 'and then all will be well. My captivity now will be merely for a time, and if only Hugh Reese keeps away I can well afford to wait.'

She had to repeat that to herself many times during the two days and two nights which passed without any change in her lot. Sometimes she sang, but the jailer's wife did not come in again

to talk to her; and when she brought food, or appeared as usual to put the cell in order, it was done in silence. Once she placed her fingers on her lips and glanced towards the door, as if to say that she was forbidden to talk to her, and so Blanche understood that she was afraid to do so, and had more than a suspicion that her husband was on guard in the passage to see that there should be no talking. The man was always surly when Blanche saw him, and never replied to her 'Good-morning,' or 'Good-evening,' as the case might be.

On the third morning, however, a wonderful thing happened, for Blanche's jailer brought in her breakfast, and left her door unlocked when he went out.

She was so astonished that at first her breakfast was untasted, then the daring thought occurred to her that she might venture out of her cell. At first she felt afraid of doing this, fearing that trouble might be in store for her if she left the cell without leave. Nevertheless she longed to go, and looked at the door continually whilst beginning to eat and drink—for, in spite of the coarseness of her food, and the close confinement from which she was suffering, her appetite was still that of a healthy young person.

At last she ventured to rise and go out of her cell, and then she walked along the passage, at either end of which was an iron and oak door.

As she approached one of these doors her heart throbbed and almost stood still, for a big soldier was stationed there with a drawn sword.

He did not speak, and when she had recovered a little from her fright, and made a movement as if to go forward, the fellow deliberately turned his back upon her, and appeared to be studying the rough wall of the passage.

Taking this for a sign that no opposition was intended, Blanche hurried down some steps, and again down others and through an open door, near which two warders were standing, who again pretended not to see her.

Knowing now that her escape was being connived at by the authorities, Blanche stepped forward more boldly, until, at length, she found herself outside in the castle yard.

As she was standing still in the shadow of the wall, half dazed by the thought of her danger, and yet wholly exhilarated by the welcome light and air, a youth stepped up to her, bearing a cloak upon his arm, and saying in a whisper—

'Lady, 'tis for you; permit me to assist you.' And then, without more ado, he wrapped her in it, drawing the hood over her head.

That done, he led her out of the castle grounds, as carefully and courteously as possible, never pausing until they had reached a by-road leading into the town.

There was a big old oak at the side of the road, and Blanche stepped quickly into the shadow of it.

'That is well,' said her young guard. 'Stand there until one joins you who will see you safely away.'

'Who is he? Will he come soon? Oh, do not go until I have thanked you!' Blanche exclaimed.

But, without a word in reply, the other left her, speeding away on the shady side of the road until he was soon lost to sight.

'I am free!' Blanche said to herself. 'But I pray God I may not be recaptured before he who is to help me arrives.'

For ten minutes, which seemed like hours, she waited, and then a horseman appeared, leading a second horse, which trotted alongside him. As they came nearer Blanche recognised, to her delight, the straight, strong form of her true knight, Sir Charles, and, stepping forward, she regarded him with a look so loving and so compelling that it drew him quickly to her side.

'Beloved!' he said, in low, thrilling tones, as he slipped down from his saddle and put an arm round her slender waist, for she was swaying as if about to fall.

'Oh, Charles!' She clung to him, hiding her face against his shoulder. '*Charles!*' The tears rained down.

'Courage, sweet one; we shall soon be home.

But '—he looked round anxiously—' we must not linger. 'Can you ride on a man's saddle?'

'I don't know. I never did such a thing,'' answered Blanche.

'My little sister does it often. Indeed, she rides bareback sometimes. I could not bring a lady's saddle without exciting suspicion,' said Sir Charles. 'Do you think you will be able to keep on?'

'I will try. Help me up, please.'

He took her in his arms to lift her, but found her so frail and weak that he could see that it would be impossible for her to ride alone on a saddle to which she was unaccustomed.

Without a word, therefore, he lifted her on to his own horse and sprang up behind.

A moment later, as he was about to urge the horse forward, some men appeared, running towards them from the direction of the castle.

Releasing his spare horse, Sir Charles sent him at full speed to meet the men, then, urging the one he rode forward, with whip and spur, he tore off in the direction of Cefn Mably.

No one checked them; indeed no one appeared in sight for a little while, and then the few who crossed their path merely stared, as at another feature of the troublous times, when they beheld the stalwart equestrian knight supporting a pale, half-swooning lady.

Once, when a hill brought their horse to a slower

pace, Blanche whispered, 'It was God who heard my prayers and sent you to my help.'

'Yes; no doubt. But I have been seeking you all the time since you disappeared. It was almost by accident that I learnt from a poor man, who had escaped from the castle, that you were imprisoned there. Then I found it a comparatively easy matter to bribe your jailers with gold to give you your liberty.'

'Thank God!' said Blanche, in low tones.

'Ay, thank God!' repeated the knight, lifting his plumed hat reverently.

They rode on in silence to the great house of Cefn Mably.

CHAPTER VII

A PROPOSAL ACCEPTED

'Love lightens life.'—E. K.

BLANCHE'S reception at Cefn Mably was something to be remembered all her life with joy and thankfulness.

Sir Nicholas himself came out to lift her from her horse and bid her welcome to his house.

Blanche, looking up at his fine face, and appreciating his kind, paternal manner, rejoiced that he was Charles's father, and ventured to press his hand as she returned his kindly greeting.

'Welcome to Cefn Mably!' he repeated, as he led her into the big hall. 'Here she is, mother! Here is our friend Mansell's daughter!' he said, bringing her up to his wife.

Lady Jane took her into her arms. 'My poor child,' she exclaimed, 'what you have suffered! But no, do not weep,' as the tears welled up in Blanche's eyes. 'You are safe now, dear one, and in good hands.'

'I know, I know; thank you very much. Forgive

me for being so stupid,' Blanche said, struggling to repress her tears, which would come, now that the long strain was over, and she was among friends.

The girls came forward to kiss her somewhat timidly, but Cecily threw her arms round her neck, and whispered, 'You dear, brave girl! You have suffered for our King!'

Blanche smiled. 'I'm afraid that didn't comfort me much,' she said, rather to Cecily's concern, who had thought she was more loyal.

Lady Jane took her young guest to her room. 'You look so pale and thin, my child,' she said. 'I almost think you ought to rest here, and not go down again to-day.'

'I think I will, if you will allow me, Lady Jane,' returned Blanche. 'I seem to be so sleepy and tired.'

'You shall sleep, dear child. Here is your maid. Gwen, come forward.'

Gwen Jones, now transformed into a well-trained maid-servant, came forward, making a deep curtsy, and looking shyly into the sweetest face, it seemed to her, that she had ever seen. Her love went out to her new mistress at that moment, and it never lessened.

'What a nice young maid!' Blanche said, adding, 'I have never had a *young* maid. I shall be glad to be served by you, Gwen.'

The girl was delighted. Again she curtsied, with a joyous smile.

'Gwen is the granddaughter of our good old nurse,' explained Lady Jane. 'She has been Cecily's maid for the last month or two, and now she is promoted to be yours. But you must not stay up talking, dear Blanche. Gwen shall assist you to undress.'

Undress! Gwen opened her eyes widely in astonishment, for the afternoon was still only half gone. But the next moment she perceived that her young mistress was pale and trembling, and quickly understood that she must rest.

Tenderly she helped Blanche to take off her soiled and travel-stained garments, bringing warm water and bathing her tired feet and limbs.

Blanche allowed her to talk as she was doing this, and Gwen's tongue ran on about her beloved employers, the wisdom and charming disposition of Mistress Cecily, and the bravery and valour of Sir Nicholas.

'Those two Gwen loves the best of all,' the girl said, in her artless way, 'Mistress Cecily and Sir Nicholas, whom men call "The Lion of Glamorgan," because he is so brave.'

'And don't you like Sir Charles also?' Blanche asked, quietly, at last.

'Yes. But he is not Sir Nicholas, nor yet Mistress Cecily,' answered the maid.

'You like me, Gwen?' Blanche asked, kindly.

'Oh, yes, mistress!' and the girl caught up her new mistress's hand to kiss it.

'Then you must like Sir Charles too. For, Gwen, can you keep a secret? Yes. Well, I am very, very much attached to him.'

'You are? Oh, then, it's Gwen who will like him as well as you!' exclaimed the girl, vehemently, adding the next moment, 'Now Gwen knows why she loved you at first sight. You are going to marry him, I know. You will one day be a Kemeys.'

Blanche blushed a little and made no answer. She had scarcely got so far as that in thought. But she smiled as she lay down, and the smile was still on her face when she fell asleep.

It was many days since she had slept in a comfortable bed, and, worn out as she was, sleep was the best restorative possible.

Lady Jane gave orders that she was not to be disturbed even for the purpose of partaking of food, and two of the older servants were deputed to watch by her bedside all through the night, so that if she awoke they might be ready to give her milk, or hot soup and cordials.

Gwen begged leave to be one of the watchers, but was told that she was too young and inexperienced, also that her services would be required by Mistress Mansell in the morning, and it would not do for her to be sleepy and tired then.

As it was she was in attendance about nine o'clock the next morning, when Blanche awoke from her long, dreamless sleep.

'Where am I?' the latter asked in bewilderment, looking about her at the tapestry on the walls, and the fineness of the big four-post bed on which she was lying.

'You are at Cefn Mably, dear mistress,' said Gwen, making her best curtsy.

'Ah, I remember; I remember everything.' Blanche closed her eyes for a few moments, overcome by the remembrance of all she had been through. 'I have been in prison, Gwen,' she said at last, looking up plaintively into the maid's blue eyes, 'in Cardiff Castle.' She sighed deeply.

'Yes, yes; I know. Forget it, mistress. Try to forget it now,' Gwen urged. 'Mistress, you are free now, and safe.'

'I prayed to God—oh, how I prayed!' Blanche continued; 'and He heard me.'

'And I prayed too, mistress,' Gwen said. 'When Sir Charles came here without you, like a man distraught in his great grief, Mistress Cecily came running to me, and threw herself, weeping, into my arms. "Gwen," she said, when she had told me everything, "you *can* pray, and you must *do nothing else but pray* until poor Mistress Blanche is found." So I said I would, and indeed I did pray hard for you, dear mistress.'

'Thank you, Gwen,' said Blanche, very gratefully.

'It is like this, mistress,' Gwen went on. 'My grannie, she taught me this. "You are only a poor little servant girl, Gwen," said she, "but the great God will hear you when you pray to Him and ask Him to grant your requests for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Yes, He will hear you just the same as if you were any one else. He is no respecter of persons. He will hear Sir Nicholas, and He will hear Gwen, the poor little servant. He is too great to notice any difference of position, or person."'

'God bless you, Gwen!' Blanche said, with emotion.

A little later, Gwen hazarded, with an arch smile, 'Mistress, it was Sir Charles who brought you here.'

'Yes. Sir Charles brought me here. How glad I am, and how thankful!'

'Sir Charles is very thankful too, mistress,' said Gwen, brightly; 'I saw him this morning, and his face is like the rising sun.'

Blanche laughed. It was the first time she had laughed for months, and Gwen was delighted to hear the low, sweet sound.

'Indeed you are quite well now, mistress, are you not?' she asked.

'Quite. And, do you know, I feel very hungry.'

'Indeed, mistress, that is a good thing,' said

the girl, withdrawing for a minute or two to summon the attendance of the other maid whose duty it was to wait upon her mistress.

In a very short time the two servants brought in a well-supplied breakfast-tray, and, sitting up in bed, wrapped in a shawl, Blanche proceeded to do full justice to the food.

While she was breakfasting a knock at the bedroom door was followed by the entrance of Cecily Kemeys, bringing a letter in her hand.

'It is for you, dear Blanche,' she said, when she had kissed her. 'From Charles,' she whispered saucily.

Blanche blushed a little as she took the sealed letter from her friend. 'Gwen, I can eat no more,' she said. 'Please take the tray away.'

'Oh, now I have spoilt your breakfast!' exclaimed Cecily.

'Not at all. I had just finished.'

'Won't you read your letter?' Cecily asked, perching herself on the side of the bed.

'Presently,' Blanche said, with pretended carelessness.

Cecily began to talk of other things—the war, the house, the family, and then of Gwen, whom she praised not a little.

Blanche listened as patiently as she could, though all the time longing for Cecily to go, in order that she might peruse her letter.

'Well, are you not going to read it?' Cecily asked, suddenly. 'Charles will be impatient.'

'Impatient? Does he want an answer?' asked the other.

'Of course he does, or I should not have brought the letter myself. You see, I thought I might be able to assist you to answer it.'

'Indeed?'

'Yes. Why should we beat about the bush? You know, and I know, that Charles is making you an offer of marriage in that letter. So I thought I could perhaps persuade you to make up your mind.'

Blanche opened her eyes widely. 'You?' she said, tentatively.

'Yes, I,' returned Cecily, nothing daunted. 'You may think I am not very old, or very wise, but at least I know Charles. And I can tell you he will make a splendid husband.'

'Stop, stop!' interrupted Blanche. 'I can hear no more just now. Do go away, that's a good child. Leave me for half-an-hour.'

'Good child!' echoed Cecily. 'You say that, when I was going to advise you in a motherly sort of way——'

'Motherly!—Oh, do go away, dear. You are too ridiculous!'

'Well, you are strange! I am sure that if ever I am in love I shall want advice, and—value it.'

'When I want advice about riding, or anything

of that sort, I will come to you for it. But you know absolutely nothing about the subject upon which you want to advise me.'

'Then I will go away,' said Cecily. 'I will tell Charles that I did my best, but have failed.' And she departed in feigned anger.

Left alone, Blanche kissed her letter, and then broke the seal. It was the first love-letter she had ever received, and her eyes fell hungrily upon its contents.

'My Sweetest and Dearest Beloved,

'Words fail me when I wish to tell you of my love, which is, I truly believe, tenderer and more devoted than man's love for woman has ever been before.

'Blanche, my peerless one, will you marry me when this Civil War is over? I shall want to settle down then, and, though I know that I am quite unworthy of you, yet, believe me, I am endeavouring to live up to the motto of our house—you know it, dearest, "God, and His grace." The thought of that is with me always. As for means, we could live quite comfortably upon the allowance which my good father makes me.

'Say Yes, sweet one, and make me the happiest man on earth.

'With sentiments of devotion, respect and love,

'Your devoted lover,

'Charles Kemeys.'

Blanche read and re-read the letter many times, and then pushed it under her pillow as the door opened to admit Gwen.

The girl was laden with beautiful roses, freshly gathered and fragrant.

'Sir Charles has sent you these, mistress,' she said, smiling. 'He has gathered them all himself. Smell their fragrance. Indeed, it is very sweet,' and she held the roses up to Blanche's face.

The latter buried her face in the lovely blooms. 'They are perfect,' she said, 'like everything else here.'

Gwen had a message to deliver, and made haste to give it. 'Sir Charles sends his compliments, and says if you answer "Yes" to his letter, will you send him back one little rose to wear next his heart.'

'One!' exclaimed Blanche. 'Not one, but many. I will send him all these sweet little love roses. Take them to him, Gwen, and tell him that I send them, and that they each bear him my love.'

Gwen was well pleased to convey the pleasant message to Sir Charles, and Blanche, once more turning to her precious letter, read it over and over again.

CHAPTER VIII

LOVE IN WAR-TIME

'Love is ever the gift of self. Its spirit may vary in the degree of intensity, but it is ever the same. It is always and everywhere the sacrifice of self.'—CANON LIDDON.

'MOTHER,' said Charles, joyfully, that same day in the evening, when Blanche had joined the family circle in one of the great reception-rooms, 'it is all right. Blanche is willing to be betrothed to me.'

'My dear child!' Lady Jane kissed the girl tenderly. 'You have no mother,' she whispered, 'I will be a mother to you.'

'How now!' exclaimed Sir Nicholas. 'Methinks, son Charles, that you are over-quick. What of the lady's father? Will he consent, think you, to give his only daughter, this peerless maiden, to a Kemeys?'

'Why, father,' exclaimed Charles, 'we can trace our lineage back to the thirteenth century!' His manner said, 'What more can be wanted?' and indeed he was proud of the long line of ancestors. The next instant, however, he said,

humbly, 'I know that I am quite unworthy of her,' and he looked admiringly at the lovely girl. 'Quite unworthy,' he repeated, 'but I *love* her.' His tone was eloquent. 'And she knows that at least I try to live in obedience to the motto of our house.'

'Ay, my son,' said his father, 'and that is well. To aim high and to live in the fear of God—or I would rather say in the love of God—and with true affection for the woman you would marry, what could be better? And if I know anything,' he continued, 'of my old friend Sir Lewis Mansell, I know he will agree with me that those whom God has joined in heart it behoves not man to put asunder. God bless you, Blanche,' he said, stooping to kiss her brow.

'Blanche will grow stronger now,' said Lady Jane, 'for happiness is the best medicine.'

'That it is!' cried the young man, 'and, please God,' he added, 'it is one that she shall have enough of in the coming years.'

'To be with you is happiness enough for me,' said she, with a look so sweet and earnest that it brought Sir Charles over to stand by her side. And they looked forward joyfully, little knowing what the future held in store.

Blanche was seated in the beautiful old garden the next day, on one of the lawns, while Charles lay at her feet, well content to talk with her about

the fighting he had gone through. She asked many questions and showed the liveliest interest, and often the conversation was interrupted, or rather interspersed with tender lovers' talk.

After that, they frequently sat there, and sometimes the young man's sisters—Cecily, or Wild Bird, as her father called her because she would not brook restraint, and Rachel, Mary, and Florence, joined them, and merry was the give and take in their lively chatter and custom of chaffing one another. Blanche had never lived in a large family before, and she enjoyed it immensely. She was so happy that her beauty increased daily, for happiness is a great beautifier. Blanche wished for nothing when Charles was by her side; he was conscious of little else but Blanche when she was near. Every morning brought the joy of meeting, every evening the regret of parting for some hours, and every experience called for new expressions and different degrees of feeling. In the garden, or riding in the park, or at chapel, or in the great hall, or spacious dining-room, the two were always together.

'Let them be happy whilst they can,' said Lady Jane, seeing a shadow on her husband's face when he regarded them. 'It will not be always May.'

Sir Nicholas looked grave, because he thought that his son, having fulfilled the mission upon which Sir Lewis Mansell had, with the King's

leave, despatched him, by placing Blanche under his father's care, ought now to return to King Charles, who needed the support and assistance of every Royalist.

The elder knight did not say anything about this to Blanche, but she ascertained by accident his feeling and what was in his mind.

One evening Blanche and Cecily Kemeys were in the great hall a little while before the others assembled for supper. For a short time they had the end of the hall, where the family always sat at table, to themselves. But servants were assembling at the lower end of the hall and sitting down at the long table set apart for them.

'We are early,' said Cecily, restlessly. 'What shall we do? Oh, I know; I will show you the secret room!'

'The secret room!' exclaimed Blanche, 'I should like to see that.'

'I should never think of showing it to a stranger,' said Cecily, cautiously, 'but you are about to enter our family, and so, of course, we consider you one of ourselves. I know you will keep the secret; you will, won't you, dear Blanche?' she added, lovingly, for Blanche was now her very dearest friend and constant companion.

'Certainly, I shall keep the secret,' Blanche replied.

'Come and look at these paintings,' said Cecily, with apparent irrelevance. 'Do you like this one, dear?—or this?' She pointed out the different merits of the pictures hanging on the wall until she had led Blanche out of the servants' sight. Then pausing before a huge, ancient painting in a heavy frame, she put her hand behind it, and touched a secret spring, whereupon the picture slipped aside revealing a door which slowly opened.

Peering into the darkness the girls perceived a staircase, down which Cecily stepped, saying, 'Come on. Follow me. Quick.'

Blanche followed rather timidly, noticing with alarm that the door closed behind her, and she could hear the picture slipping back into its place. It would not do, however, for one of the family, or at least one who was going to belong to the family to display fear, and therefore she said nothing, but followed Cecily down the stairs and into a dark room.

'Here we are in the vault under the library,' said Cecily. 'Listen. What is that?'

Through a hole in the ceiling of the vault-like room they could see daylight and hear Sir Nicholas speaking in loud and angry tones.

''Tis no use at all,' he cried, 'no use at all talking to you. Our King is in danger; the power of the Parliament is now predominant in North

Wales; I am striving with all my might to aid our cause, and you—you waste the precious time hanging on to the apron-strings of a woman, making love forsooth, whilst your King and country are being betrayed. Shame on you, Charles Kemeys! Shame, thrice shame upon you!'

'Father!' Charles answered, in indignant tones, 'speak not to me like that. You and my mother have hitherto favoured my love——'

'Tut! Tut! 'Twas right enough at first—but now, when your King needs you, when men are dubbing you a "carpet-knight," when they are crying shame on you for sitting still, the case is very different.'

'It is very different,' said Charles, determinedly. 'I shall join Colonel Gerard's force to-morrow! Father, you shall never speak to me again like this. 'Twas only the thought of my dear love's grief if I left her that restrained me hitherto. Indeed 'twas only that, for I, too, am loyal, father, and I would fain be by our King.'

'Come away,' said Cecily, plucking at Blanche's sleeve. 'Come away, dear Blanche. We ought not to have listened.'

''Twas God,' whispered Blanche, ''twas God who sent me here. I did not know—oh, I did not know what I was doing!'

'Of course you didn't,' said Cecily. 'Don't

look so distressed, Blanche. It was not your fault, but ours, for we ought to have told you. We should have done so had not our mother said, "No. Let them be happy while they can. It is not always May." Don't tremble so, Blanche dear'—Cecily had slipped her arm round the other's slender waist and could feel it trembling—'you will be a heroine now and will send Charles to the battle.'

And Blanche did send him.

That very evening after supper she lured him forth into the garden; and there, in the twilight hour, amongst the sweet odours of the flowers, she bravely bade him allow no consideration about her to keep him from his duty.

'My father has left me, and I know not whether I shall ever see him again,' she said, pathetically, 'but 'twas for the King, and now you must go, and 'tis for the King again, and my heart is like to break, Charles dear, but you must go. You can do no other, for it is your duty.'

'And you will pray for me, sweet one,' Charles answered, tenderly, 'and watch for my return?'

'Yes, I will indeed, and God grant it may be soon!' cried Blanche, with tears in her eyes.

And the next day he went, setting out bravely for the war, and riding the best horse in his father's stables, whilst next his heart, under his fine dress,

he bore a single tress of beautiful dark hair, tied with gold thread.

Blanche had placed it where it lay, and Blanche's cheering words, 'Go on to victory; then return to me,' were lingering in his ears.

CHAPTER IX

A BOLT FROM THE BLUE

'Villainy when detected never gives up, but boldly adds impudence to imposture.'—GOLDSMITH.

AFTER Charles Kemeys, together with a small following of his father's retainers, had gone to the war, a weariful time ensued for Blanche Mansell. Mindful of her promise to her lover, she spent hours daily on her knees in the chapel, and at such times an observer might have seen that Gwen Jones knelt, too, in a remote corner by the door, and was apparently as diligent as her mistress in her prayers.

At other times Blanche, still followed by her devoted maid, would betake herself to one of the upper chambers in the great house, and there, looking through the dormer window, would strain eager eyes longingly in every direction whence might come soldiers returning from the war, or messengers riding post haste with despatches for Sir Nicholas Kemeys.

The news which came from time to time from

the seat of war was very grave. First, Beachley was taken by General Massey; then Monmouth was betrayed by Lieut.-Colonel Kyle, and taken possession of by him. This place was regarded as the very key to South Wales, and was of immense consequence to the Royalists. Before long they made a grand effort under the Marquis of Worcester to retake it, but Massey was again victorious, and the Royalists were defeated with heavy losses.

Blanche, looking out from her high window one day, espied a little company of soldiers coming towards Cefn Mably, whom she recognised upon closer inspection to be some of the men who had accompanied Charles to the war. They had been taken captive by General Massey, who had treated them very kindly, set them free, and sent them home with a letter to their master.

Sir Nicholas, who was superintending the making of entrenchments round about his mansion, in anticipation of an attack at some future time, read it aloud, somewhat gingerly, to those about him. It stated in plain words that the object of Parliament was not to destroy or enslave people, or to take away their goods, but to preserve their lives and fortunes, to open the course of justice and free them from their heavy burdens.[1]

'Fair words,' commented Sir Nicholas; 'but I

[1] *Civil War in Wales*, by John Rowland Thomas.

cannot pin my faith to them, any more than I can believe in the canting, snivelling, psalm-singing, hypocritical Roundheads!' So, destroying the letter, he went on digging his entrenchments.

When asked what had become of their young master, the men replied that he had not been taken prisoner, neither had he been slain, but he had disappeared with the Royalists who had escaped.

> 'He that is in battle slain
> Can never rise to fight again;
> But he that fights and runs away
> May live to fight another day,'

quoted Sir Nicholas grimly, and went on building his sunken fosse and making his defences.

And again Blanche Mansell and her maid betook themselves to prayer and watching, as indeed did the lady of the house and her daughters, but more fitfully, and not with the same passionate devotion.

Then came news of the capture of Montgomery, and the conquest of Powis Castle, by the Roundheads. Next Colonel Gerard himself passed through Glamorganshire on his way from Pembrokeshire, where he had made himself detested by the Welsh countrymen, who had been most cruelly treated by him and his soldiers.

Sir Nicholas was so disgusted by this time with Colonel Gerard's conduct that, loyal though he was, he hung back from joining him even for a

short time, and kept his men at work upon the entrenchments, watching over them jealously the while, lest they should steal away and enlist with Gerard. But he need not have feared, for news had reached Glamorganshire, and was circulated amongst the poor, which deterred one and all from serving under such a master. It was said that in fighting under him the poor Welsh foot soldiers were sometimes forced on by the cavalry behind, when they had no chance of victory. Gerard respected not their lives, so long as he could by their means gain any post he wanted.

Sir Nicholas was of firm conviction, and so was Lady Jane, who was addicted to presentiments, that the war would come in time to their very doors, and that Cefn Mably itself would be besieged. He therefore strengthened the position of the house in every possible way; and his wife, for her part, procured as large a store of provisions as she could get from all the countryside.

After that, all through the winter, came news at intervals of defeats and victories of minor importance; for the land continued racked and tormented by the civil war. Hopes and fears of many kinds came to Blanche, but never so much as one line of writing from her beloved's hand.

'My child, you are growing thin and pale,' said Lady Jane one morning, taking Blanche in her arms and kissing her with much tenderness.

'All this worry and suspense are too trying for you. God grant our Charles may return to us ere long!'

'Lady Jane,' whispered Blanche, hiding her face against the other's kind, motherly bosom, 'do you think God hears my prayers? I pray so much, and there never comes one little line from Charles.'

'He was ever slow to write,' answered Lady Jane, soothingly, 'and ever readier with sword than with pen. I know that our prayers do not sink into the ground, but go up, up, till they reach the throne of Grace;' and there was a rapt expression in her comely face.

So Blanche took heart again, and the winter passed away, giving place to the sweeter, brighter days of spring.

One morning, when the great trees about Cefn Mably were breaking into leaf, tipping the outlines of the branches with freshest green, and the spring flowers in the hanging garden were filling the air with fragrance, Blanche, sitting at her post of observation in one of the topmost windows of the house, with Gwen upon a footstool at her feet, espied a large bird flying straight towards her window.

'Oh, look, Gwen! Look at that bird! Is it a pigeon? It is coming towards our window. It is! It is!' she exclaimed.

Gwen rose, the better to see it. ''Tis that,

mistress,' said she. 'It is flying straight for these top windows. The others are all shut. Methinks if we stand back it will come in here.'

'Yes, yes.' Blanche moved away from the window.

The pigeon, a large bird, with long wings and a circle of bare red skin about the eyes, flew straight into the room, and fell exhausted on the floor. It would not allow them to touch it, however, but flapped its wings and half flew and half ran round the room, till it had rid itself of some encumbrance. Then, with a cry, 'Coo! Coo!' it flew out of the window and across to the dovecote at the other side of the house.

''Tis one of the Cefn Mably carrier pigeons,' said Blanche. 'Sir Charles showed me them one day. They were all like that. It will have gone to its mate now. Happy bird!'

'But look, mistress, what it has left upon the ground!' said Gwen, picking up a tiny note as she spoke.

Blanche caught hold of it with eagerness. 'A letter! A letter! At last!' she cried. 'Sir Charles has written to me, and sent his note in this way. Thank God! Oh, thank God!'

Opening the letter with trembling hands, she looked at it with tears of joy in her eyes, and therefore could not decipher a single word.

Gwen stood watching her in great suspense and

excitement. She, too, was most anxious to hear tidings of Sir Charles.

'What is it, dear mistress?' she said. 'Pray be calm. God grant it is good news! He has heard our prayers at last! Thank God! Thank God!' She clasped her hands, looking up fervently into the fair blue sky.

Blanche dashed her tears away, and began to read; then she uttered a cry of disappointment, whilst the letter slid from her hand and fell upon the floor.

'Mistress! mistress! What is it? Oh, what is it?'

Blanche began to laugh, hysterically.

'Dear mistress, what does it say?'

Blanche kicked the missive on the floor with one shapely foot. Indeed, she scarcely knew what she did.

'Mistress!' Gwen snatched up the little note, glanced at it—alas, she could not read it!—and thrust it into her bosom. Nice, or nasty, it was from Sir Charles Kemeys, and must be cherished for his sake. But she was soon undeceived.

'It is not from him!' cried poor Blanche. 'Oh! And I did so want a letter! And I thanked God!' She burst into tears.

'Not from Sir Charles?' wailed Gwen, and taking the note from her bosom she dashed it furiously upon the floor.

Then the two wept together.

'But whom is the letter from, dear mistress?' asked Gwen, at length. 'Whom is it from? And about what is it concerned?'

'Indeed I care not, child,' answered her mistress. ''Tis not from Charles, that is all I know.'

There was silence for a few minutes in the bare turret chamber. Blanche looked with a full heart across the fair country scene, gay with young green, to the bright, glistening waters of the Bristol Channel, dotted with sails of many different vessels. Oh, why was life so sad, so dark, so empty? For a brief space after Sir Charles Kemeys had made her an offer of marriage she had lived in Paradise, but he went away—at her bidding, it is true, but still he went—and a long, dark winter followed; and now, just when she was hoping for a little joy and a return of the sweet happiness, came this bitter disappointment.

'Mistress,' implored Gwen, 'read the letter. Perchance, although it is not from him, it concerns Sir Charles.'

Startled by the thought, Blanche held out her hand for it, saying, 'I thought it began oddly, but it was not his handwriting, that was sufficient for me. However, I will now read it.'

Resting her eager face upon her hands, Gwen leaned forward, watching her mistress's face as she commenced to read. She saw the pale cheeks

grow paler for a moment; then, flushing up with sudden passion, her mistress dropped the letter from her hands as if it burnt them.

'Tis my enemy!' cried Blanche, 'my heartless, cruel enemy who has written this!'

'Oh, mistress! What is it?'

'A threat; a menace. Pick up the letter, Gwen. I will read it to you. 'Tis from that Roundhead Reese, who wants to force me to marry him. He writes,' and she read aloud, translating it into Welsh—

'MISTRESS BLANCHE MANSELL,

'You have escaped me once, but only once. I shall have you in my power again, and then there will be no escape for you. Fate has decreed you shall be mine. I claim the fulfilment of your promise, and only by death can you be freed from it. It is in vain for you to protect yourself, in vain for you to seek the protection of others. As surely as a Cefn Mably pigeon brings you this note, so surely shall you be my wife, by fair means or foul.

'Your obedient servant,

'HUGH REESE.

'P.S.—If any other person should receive this letter, he is requested to hand it over to Mistress Blanche Mansell.'

'The miscreant!' cried Blanche. 'The brute! The coward! I shall take it to Sir Nicholas; he will protect me!'

'Yes, yes. Take it to Sir Nicholas. He is great, he is strong; he will know what to do!' exclaimed Gwen, following her lady out of the room and down the stairs.

As they passed the place where the Cefn Mably private gallows yawned over depths below, Blanche paused and shuddered.

'See!' she said, pointing to the dreadful spot. 'Sir Nicholas vowed to hang yon creature here, if he ever got him in his power; and in truth, Gwen, I would rather throw myself down that abyss than be the wife of such a man.'

'You never shall be! Never!' cried Gwen, passionately, resolving in her own mind that she would watch over her mistress night and day until Sir Charles Kemeys returned.

Down-stairs, on inquiry, they found Sir Nicholas was not at home, having ridden away alone, as his custom was in those troublous times, to attend some meeting of the Glamorganshire Royalists.

Blanche therefore took her letter to Lady Jane, who was much concerned about it, and bade Blanche take great heed that she never went out alone.

'For I fear,' said the lady, 'that the wretch hath been tampering with our servants, else how

could he have obtained one of our carrier pigeons? —unless,' and she turned pale at the thought, 'he has possessed himself of one of those which Charles's men took with them in order that they might send back private messages.'

'If the birds have been stolen from them, that may account for our not having heard from Charles,' said Blanche, looking very sad. However, in a few moments her face brightened, as she added, 'Our Charles cannot be in Hugh Reese's clutches, or the latter would have made haste to have told me so, in order that I might be in his power and yield to his wish.' Nevertheless she sighed. 'I would that we could hear from Charles!' she added, wearily.

'Courage! Courage, my dear. It may be that we shall hear quite soon now,'' answered the older woman.

CHAPTER X

CAPTURED

'Pray Jesus that our native land see not such times again,
For in the days of chivalry blood was as water shed.
And England rang with battle shouts and wailing for the dead—
While widows—ah, too many! for slaughtered husbands mourned:
And orphans wept for fathers that never were returned.'

OSRIC.

'I AM so weary of staying in the house,' cried Cecily Kemeys, one fine day towards the end of June. 'Methinks, Blanche dear, these restrictions of father are too grievous to be borne. We must not go further than the gardens unattended by men-servants, forsooth! And our men are all far too busy to wait upon idle gentlewomen.'

'Poor Cecily!' cried Blanche Mansell, who, for once, was sitting with her embroidery in the drawing-room, where Cecily was talking to her in a cosily curtained recess, apart from the other ladies. 'It is hard for you to sit still. You cannot spend your days in making curious embroideries, like your sisters.'

'Nay; that I cannot! I am a wild bird. You know father always calls me his wild bird. Blanche, I can understand his telling you to stay here. Your freedom has been threatened. You have an enemy, one who might carry you off, if you were to allow your lovely face to be seen. No one dreams of running away with me. I am not so valuable.'

The orders of Sir Nicholas were strict, for the perils which might befall girls of gentle birth were legion. The Battle of Naseby had just given an immense victory to the Parliamentarians.

King Charles, fleeing from place to place, had taken refuge at Hereford, and was now said to be on his way to Raglan Castle, in Monmouthshire, the seat of the Marquis of Worcester. The Roundheads were pursuing their victorious course across the country westward. The Welsh, oppressed and ill used by the extortions of Colonel Charles Gerard and other leaders, and the ravages of their soldiers, and greatly won by the clemency of the Parliamentarians, although at first loyal, were now gladly submitting in various places to the Roundhead victors.

Attached more or less to each side was a miscellaneous horde of desperadoes, whose reckless doings made havoc in many a beautiful country spot. To defend themselves from these and from the extortions of each party, the Clubmen, who would join neither side but fought in self-defence and for peace, increased in numbers. Sir Nicholas was

right in saying those were no times for women to be outside the safely guarded circles of their homes.

'Poor Cecily!'

'Pray do not "poor Cecily!" me any more; but leave your work, dear Blanche, and come and have a little fun. 'Tis moped to death I am here.'

'What kind of fun?'

Cecily was thoughtful for a few moments. Then she said, 'Will you come with me? I have long wanted to explore the underground passage leading from the secret room across the park to the river side. There at least we shall be safe. We might take a lantern and go on a voyage of discovery, or shall we say a pilgrimage?'

Blanche was rather taken with the idea.

'Very well, Cecily,' she answered; 'no one can touch us if we are underground, for the enemy does not know of this way, I suppose?'

'Indeed no,' answered Cecily. ''Twould be an ill day for us if the enemy found it out. In fact, we should have to get the passage blocked up. But now let us go; I will take a lantern.'

In ten minutes they were standing by the oil painting in the hall which concealed the secret door. After carefully looking round to see if they were observed, Cecily touched the secret spring, the picture slid back, the door opened, and they passed through and began to descend the stairs. Soon

they were in the hidden room where they had stood before, when Blanche overheard Sir Nicholas chiding Charles.

Tears filled the girl's eyes at the remembrance. Ah, little she thought when, acting on the knowledge gained by those words, she bade Charles go to the war, that the parting with him would be so grievous. Scarcely would she have had courage to send him, had she known what it would cost.

'Come on,' said Cecily, passing through an extremely narrow door leading from the room to another dark flight of steps winding far below the foundations of the house.

Blanche followed somewhat timidly. The steps were worn and damp; the way was dark, being only lit by the light from Cecily's lantern.

'Now we have come to the end of the stairs,' said Cecily, at length, 'and here is the beginning of the passage. How dark it looks! Say, are you afraid, Blanche?'

'No, no. We will go on!' exclaimed the other.

Cecily shook off her strange timidity at the sight of the yawning, grave-like entrance to the subterranean passage, and plodded steadily on over the inequalities of the rough way, followed closely by Blanche. Sometimes they trod on rocky stone for many yards together; at other times they found themselves walking on soft earth, some of which had been scooped out to make the tunnel-like passage:

again shells and even coal appeared upon their path. As for the walls, if walls they could be called, they were most uneven, rocks projecting here and there, roots of trees and masses of dried clay forming unequal sides to the narrow passage. The air was far from good; it seemed to come in at intervals through narrow openings in the low roof of the passage. Soon both girls were exhausted, and stopped short, to discuss the position.

'We seem to have been walking a tremendous way,' said Blanche. 'Don't you think we have been a hundred miles?' and she laughed at her little joke.

The laugh was echoed back from the passage behind with a weird, unearthly sound.

Cecily was so startled that she let her lantern fall, and, to add to their alarm, they found themselves in darkness.

'Oh, Cecily!' cried Blanche.

'Oh, Cecily! Oh, Cecily! Oh, Cecily!' mocked echoes in front and behind. It was horrible. The poor girls felt for each other's hands and clung together, afraid to speak above a whisper, lest their words should be repeated.

'Shall we return?' said Cecily. 'I am so afraid. I think if we were to meet any one, or touch any one, I should die of fright.'

'No one will be here,' said Blanche, endeavouring to reassure her, although her own heart beat so

loudly that it seemed to deafen her. 'And I think that as we have gone so far we had better go on. Doubtless there will be light at the other end—the end by the river, you know.'

'Very well. It is a fearfully long way back, and it cannot be far from the river.' And again Cecily went on.

After walking in silence hand in hand for about a quarter of an hour, they felt the air was better, and perceived a gleam of daylight before them. Pressing forward to this, they came up to the end of the passage, and felt a smooth surface like a door. How to open it was the problem, and for some time they tried in vain to do so. There was no door handle, and there were no bolts or bars. They pressed all about and around it in vain, no secret springs were there.

At last, when they felt almost in despair, Cecily stamped upon the ground, crying, 'I cannot do it! I cannot!'

That instant the door opened outside, creaking and wheezing as it did so, as if it had been long shut. The welcome daylight dazzled the girls after the intense darkness, and the fresh air seemed to intoxicate them with ozone.

They staggered out into a well-like pit, overgrown with bracken and young willows, which almost met over their head, completely concealing the doorway from any one above. The sound of

bubbling, flowing water reminded them that they were near the river.

Cautiously climbing up the side of a rock, Cecily gazed around. There seemed to be no one about. A streamlet close by was splashing down towards the river; the sunshine rested on the wider, steadier spread of water. A lark rose up from the field behind, and soared on high, singing its inimitable song.

'It's lovely here, and no one is about,' said Cecily, looking back at Blanche. 'Come, dearest, let us sit on one of these great boulders for a little while. There can be no objection to our doing that in this retired spot.'

'Are you quite, quite certain no one is near?' asked Blanche, timidly.

'Quite certain. We have the field all to ourselves.'

Had they? They thought so, and were very happy, as climbing up out of the pit they sat down on a rock by the river side, and, watching the quiet flow of the water, talked in low tones of their adventure and the fright they had been in.

Now it happened that their talk and the noise of the little stream prevented them from hearing the sound of approaching footsteps.

'Marry! 'tis rare luck this!' cried all at once a rude voice from the field behind them. 'I have you now, my lady! Seize the maids, my lads. We will have speech with them.'

'Oh, Blanche!' cried Cecily, starting up and looking round. 'Blanche, what shall we do?'

Blanche said not a word. She, too, had risen, and, pale as death, was looking with wide, frightened eyes at the one man in all the world whom she most wished to avoid.

Hugh Reese was striding forward across the field towards them, accompanied by half-a-dozen roughs, flourishing thick sticks and looking ready for any deed of violence.

In five minutes these ruffians, with rude jeers and cursings, had seized the frightened girls and bound their hands behind their backs with cords that cut into their delicate flesh, Reese looking on meanwhile and giving directions.

'Now, my men,' said he, 'these ladies are Royalists, and they are my captives.'

'Ours,' muttered the men.

Reese did not appear to hear. He put his hand in his pocket and drew out some money. 'Here is gold,' said he, giving it to them, 'for your valuable services. I will take one lady on my horse, and you, Will, must take another;' he said the last to one of the men who was of a rather different, though not less ruffianly appearance than the others. 'We shall soon tear away across the country with them.'

'Master Reese,' implored Blanche, finding her voice at length—all this time she had been too

terrified to speak—'I pray you commit not this wickedness. Let me go, I beg. Release me, I entreat you.' And she raised her eyes imploringly to his.

'You may as well save your breath,' he answered, rudely. 'No words of yours can profit you.'

Blanche was silent a moment or two, then, moved by Cecily's tears—the girl was crying as if her heart would break, chiefly for Blanche's sake, because of having led her into that danger—she began to beg him to liberate her companion, promising to accompany him quietly if he would allow Mistress Kemeys to go free.

At that he laughed loudly, saying that he knew well what her promises were worth—for he would still have it that she had promised to marry him, although in truth she had not said the words—and, signing to the men to do as he bade them, he vaulted on to his saddle.

Blanche was lifted up, in spite of her struggles, and placed before him, but she slid down again, causing the frightened horse to start back, rear, and almost throw its rider.

In a tremendous rage, and losing all command of himself, Reese threw his heavy-handled riding-whip at her head with such violence that she fell fainting to the ground.

'Coward!' screamed Cecily, forgetting her own woes in alarm for her friend, and making a great

effort to get to her side. 'Is that the way you treat the maid you fain would wed?'

Reese glared at her furiously for a moment. 'Stop that girl's noise!' he shouted, almost beside himself with rage.

'Ay, ay, sir,' responded a ruffian, silencing poor Cecily with a blow which put an end to her consciousness of what was going on.

The insensible girls were then placed each in front of a rider, who forthwith started off across the field to a lane at the back of it.

The other men stood looking after them and jeering at the misfortunes of the two ladies.

CHAPTER XI

SIR CHARLES KEMEYS RETURNS

'In peace, Love tunes the shepherd's reed:
In war, he mounts the warrior's steed:
In halls in gay attire is seen:
In hamlets dances on the green.
Love rules the court, the camp, the grove,
And men below and saints above:
For Love is Heaven, and Heaven is Love.'

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

'WHERE is she? Where is Blanche? Speak! Tell me! Is she not here?' As he spoke Sir Charles Kemeys looked round at the dear home faces in consternation and alarm. 'Mother! Father! Where is she? Put me out of my suspense. Where is my Blanche?' It was pitiful how his tones became more and more despairing.

'My dear Charles,' said Lady Jane, ''twas only yesterday that she was here among us——'

'Yesterday!' he interrupted, horror-struck; 'yesterday! Then where is she to-day?'

'God knows, my son,' answered his father, sadly. 'Our Wild Bird, too, has gone,' and he sighed heavily.

'Cecily too—and Blanche! Blanche, whom I left to your care! God help me!' And Charles Kemeys dropped into one of the beautifully carved hall chairs, as if bereft of strength. He was dusty and travel-stained, the sash round his waist was torn, his coat was soiled with dark, ominous smears, looking like blood-stains which had dried upon it. He had ridden far since daylight that morning, buoyed up by the hope of meeting his beloved, and now it was almost more than he could bear to find that she was gone—lost; perchance carried off by the enemy.

'We have sought for her everywhere,' said Lady Jane. 'The servants have scoured the neighbourhood. Your father has made thorough search in Cardiff. The newly appointed Governor, a very different man from the last, has given him every assistance. The Clubmen of the neighbourhood—a large body now—have promised their aid. We trust she will soon be found.'

Charles Kemeys arose. 'I will find her,' he said, 'if mortal man can do it.' His blue eyes flashed; he held himself erect. He would do wonders. '"God and His grace" will help me,' he added, more soberly.

'My boy,' said his father, 'your spirit is willing, and will do much, but we "in this mortal coil" are greatly dependent upon our bodies. Therefore you must eat, drink, bathe, sleep before you start upon

your quest—or, mark my words, you will never live to see it through.'

His son uttered an impatient exclamation. 'It matters not about me,' said he; 'without Blanche I should not care to live!' And then, suddenly his air of bravado vanished, and he burst into loud, tearless sobs, so terrible to witness that his stepmother and his sisters, unable to bear the sight, stole quietly away.

Sir Nicholas, remaining with Charles, reached down from the wall one of the old silver drinking-cups bearing the motto inscribed upon it, 'Allwedd y Galon yw Cwrw' (Beer is the key of the heart), and looked at it disconsolately, knowing full well the untruth of the legend.

'But you must eat, my son,' said Sir Nicholas. Then he bade the servants have food prepared for Sir Charles, and, placing his hand on his arm, he led him to his own room. 'Charles, you must bathe, eat and sleep,' he said, 'then you will be man enough to endeavour to rescue your dear lady.'

The habit of filial obedience was strong. Charles Kemeys plunged his head into cold water, put on fresh linen, returned to the hall and ate and drank, and then, turning to his father, he said, 'So much, sir, have I obeyed you. But sleep will not visit my eyes until I find her.'

Perceiving he spoke truly, Sir Nicholas desired

him to come into his smoking-room, and immediately led the way there. It was an ancient panelled room, with a stone table attached to the wall of an alcove, from which hung a large japanned claret jug.

'I have something to disclose to you,' said the father, 'but first tell me respecting the King—'tis, of course, most important about him.'

'Yes, yes.' But Charles said the words in a constrained manner, as if duty alone compelled the admission. However, he went on, 'You have heard of the disastrous fight at Naseby, when so many of our side were slain and made prisoners——'

'Yes, yes, I know all that. But where is our King now?' Sir Nicholas spoke in haste. It seemed as if he could not bear to hear of Naseby, and all that happened there. 'Has our King arrived at Raglan Castle?' he asked.

'Yes, father, that he has! And what think you, sir, he is doing now, when his bleeding land calls for a wise head and a strong hand at the helm?' Charles spoke bitterly.

'He is surely collecting forces, writing despatches to be sent by trusty messengers to important men, taking counsel with his advisers, and, perchance, as he is a wise man, petitioning Heaven for aid.'

'Not so! not so! King Charles is playing at bowls, hunting, hawking, and enjoying the priceless entertainment of the Marquis of Worcester at his lovely seat.'

'But what are the King's advisers doing? How comes it he sleeps thus in the hour of danger?' exclaimed Sir Nicholas, aghast.

'Many of his best advisers have gone away, disgusted with his conduct and the revelations of his falseness made in his papers, which were taken at Naseby, and proclaimed aloud by the Roundheads; others have been slain on the battlefield. The King is now surrounded by idle, unprincipled men.'

'Ah, that explains it all,' interrupted Sir Nicholas. 'The King is weak, lamentably weak, and that scum has him in its clutches.'

'But he ought to be man enough to do right independently of others.'

'He ought; he ought. Still, he is the King. Charles, my son, be loyal. Remember, "The King can do no wrong."' Now Sir Nicholas spoke loudly and with conviction. 'Cover up his weaknesses. Look not at them, except to hide them from others; do your best for the King, my son. Since you rejoined his forces has he spoken much with you? Does he continue to like you well?'

'Yes, indeed, sir; that he does!'

'Has he witnessed more of your prowess in the fight?'

'Nay, I know not. He says that I play bowls well for so young a man.' Charles spoke with great dissatisfaction. 'However,' he added, seeing

the pain in his father's face, 'I will do what I can when I return—to arouse him, I mean.'

'Get near him, stay by his side, arouse him, give him advice—you are young, but you have a head on your shoulders. Make him see where his duty lies, and that it is unmanly to play at games when his throne is tottering.'

'Yes, sir, yes. I will do all that,' struck in Charles, impatiently. 'But now, sir, what have you to tell me? Is it about Blanche? Speak out, I pray you. Have you found some clue?'

Sir Nicholas told him then about the letter brought by the carrier pigeon, and Blanche's terror at its words of threatening.

Sir Charles sprang to his feet. 'So it was he—that rascal! that hound! who tampered with my men at Pontypool and stole our carrier pigeons away! The men were drunk one night, and next morning the birds were gone. That prevented my writing as I promised.'

Sir Nicholas was very angry; he spoke threateningly of what would be the fate of Hugh Reese, if he ever got into his hands.

Charles strode up and down the room, almost beside himself to think that the bird which should have borne his love-letter to his sweetheart carried her, instead, his wicked rival's threats.

'The man is a villain!' he cried, furiously. 'And now I doubt not he has got her in his power!

Father, I promised the King I would return to join him almost immediately—he wanted me to play with him, forsooth, though I meant it to be work—but I must seek Blanche first. I must find her, or my heart will break!'

'Let us consider where that vile Roundhead may have taken our dear girls,' said Sir Nicholas, whose heart was also wrung, to think of the possible fate of his 'Wild Bird.'

They were discussing the subject of the exact whereabouts of the Parliamentarians in the neighbourhood, when a low knock was heard at the door.

'Enter,' said Sir Nicholas, loudly, and with impatience.

Gwen came in, curtsying low. She wore the green livery of the house servants, and her face was so white above her gown that she looked like a beautiful lily on its stem.

'If you please, gentlemen,' she said, in Welsh, and her sweet voice was hoarse and choked so that Sir Charles scarcely knew it, 'I think I know in what way Mistress Mansell and Mistress Cecily left the house.'

'Well now, woman, that is precisely what we want to know!' cried Sir Nicholas, looking at her wonderingly.

'Speak! Speak, Gwen!' implored Charles.

She turned her blue eyes full upon his sad

countenance. How he loved Blanche! Yes, and she loved her, too.

'Sirs,' she began, 'my mistress often talked in her sleep when she was troubled——' She broke down, weeping.

Sir Charles uttered an impatient exclamation. 'Go on with your tale!' he cried; 'time presses. Think what may be happening.'

'Sir Charles, I know,' said Gwen, 'and I will tell you all. My mistress in her sleep made mention of a secret passage, where you did once walk home full sorrowfully because she was missing. I know that she often wanted to see the place. Yesterday morning she was with Mistress Cecily in the drawing-room, whilst I, waiting for her in the hall in a recess, being tired, fell asleep. I awoke suddenly, to find that a door near me was closing, and then a great, heavy picture came down slowly until it completely covered the place. I thought afterwards that I had been dreaming, and I did not connect it with my mistress's disappearance. I was in such great distress about that, it made me forget everything else. I have been weeping and seeking for her ever since, and to-day I thought it might be well to examine that picture. I did so, and found a spring, which when touched moved the picture and opened a door. There were steps——'

'She has found the secret passage!' said Sir Nicholas, looking significantly at Charles.

'The secret is safe with her,' said his son. 'Go on, Gwen.'

The maid continued her story, saying that she went down the steps into the concealed room. Not finding her mistress there, and perceiving another door open, she passed through it, and went on a long way through a dark passage, animated solely by the hope that she would find her mistress. Straight on she went to the very end of the passage, where she came to a door which stood ajar.

'Sirs,' said Gwen, in conclusion, 'I passed through it, climbed out of the deep hole into which it opened and looked round. There was no one, no one at all to be seen. But—look—I found these!' She laid a little heap of fragments on the stone table before them. 'Look,' she repeated, 'this torn bit of lace comes from my mistress's gown!' The maid wept. 'And this buckle,' she sobbed, 'is from her shoe! That piece of stuff is from Mistress Cecily's blue gown—she was wearing it—you know it, sir?' she said to Sir Nicholas. 'And this hair, this pretty piece of beautiful dark hair of my mistress, with dried blood upon it, was stuck to this piece of stone!' Her tears fell over it.

'Charles!' cried Sir Nicholas. 'They have been murdered!'

'Or carried off,' said his son, gloomily. 'My darling, to think she has been wounded! Did you find anything more, Gwen?'

'No, sir. I searched all over. The bracken was broken, and the grass close by in the field was trodden down; there were marks of great trampling, that was all. I inspected carefully down by the water, and in every hole and corner. There was no further trace of them!'

'It was not very far from the place where Reese found Blanche before,' said Charles to his father, 'that time he was in the boat. I must have my horse! Gwen, tell the men to saddle me the best steed in my father's stables.'

'Yes, sir. And will you take men with you?' Gwen asked, quite anxiously.

'No, no.'

'But I say, Yes,' said his father. 'My son, three pairs of hands are better than one. Gwen, order three horses and two men.'

'Yes, sir.' And Gwen withdrew.

Half-an-hour later, when Charles Kemeys rode away from Cefn Mably, he was followed by two armed riders, one of whom seemed young and slight, and wore the dress of a page.

CHAPTER XII

THE KING

'Methinks there's something lonely in the state of kings!
None dare come near them. As the eagle, poised
Upon his sightless throne in upper air,
Scares gentler birds away; so kings, cut off
From human kindred by the curse of power,
Are shunned, and live alone. Who dare come near
The region of a king? There is a wall
Which fences kings from close approach of men:
They live respected. Oh, that cheat respect!
As if the homage which abases others
Could comfort him that has't. Alone—alone,
Prisoned in ermine and a velvet chair,
Shut off from hope, the height being all attained,
Yet touched by terrors—what can soothe a king?'

W. B. Procter.

'GWEN, how is this? How came you here? And in that dress! What means this folly?' Sir Charles Kemeys spoke very angrily.

A day of hard riding, and close searching of the countryside was over, and for the first time, as evening closed in and they drew up at the door of a village inn, Sir Charles scrutinised his followers closely. To his annoyance, he had discovered that one of them was Gwen in a page's dress.

'I crave your pardon, sir.' Gwen's sweet

Welsh tones were full of feeling. 'I could not stay at home when my mistress was lost, and, it might be, in affliction. Sir, I could not!'

'Do you love your mistress so much, Gwen?' he asked, softly.

'Ay, sir, I do! More than anything in the world!' the girl exclaimed, with deep feeling.

Sir Charles did not seem to take any notice. He turned to his other follower, Hugh Hughes, who also loved him.

'Did you know of this, Hugh?' he asked.

'Ay, sir, I did. But I thought the maid came by your orders, that she might tend her mistress when we find her.'

''Twas a good thought,' said Sir Charles, frowning. 'But it is somewhat embarrassing to have a maid in our party.'

Gwen interposed. 'By your leave, sir,' she said, 'I would suggest that you take no trouble in the matter. People shall not find out. I will look after myself. Never fear.'

Sir Charles shook his head unbelievingly. But Gwen went on, 'I shall say I have friends in the place, and will leave you here, if you pledge me your word, sir, that you will not start without poor Gwen on the morrow.'

'Of course we won't leave you behind. Well, you can be here by six in the morning. We shall not have gone before then.'

'Very well, sir.' Gwen touched her cap, gave up her horse to Hugh, with a little smile, and turned slowly away on foot.

The landlord of the inn came to the door—a portly personage, who watched the newly arrived horsemen with sharp eyes.

'Landlord, I require a bedroom for the night, and a shakedown near it for my knave,' said Sir Charles, affably.

'Two knaves, sir?' suggested the landlord, looking at Gwen's retreating figure.

'No; one. Yonder lad has friends in the village. He goes there to sleep, but leaves his horse here.'

'Very good, sir. We can accommodate you.' The innkeeper called a hostler sharply to come and look after the three horses, and then went in, shouting for his women folk to come and prepare supper.

Later, as Sir Charles supped with his faithful Hugh—the latter being removed to the lower end of the table—the landlord entertained Sir Charles by detailing the news of the neighbourhood, amongst other items mentioning that two men, supposed to be Royalists and emissaries of the King, then staying at Raglan, were sleeping that night at the 'Blue Boar,' the rival inn in the village.

Sir Charles did not appear to take any notice

of this at the time; but after supper, when they were alone, he sent Hugh out on a little private business. Scarcely had Hugh gone when Gwen entered.

'May I speak to you, sir?' she asked, standing humbly by the door.

'Certainly. What is it, Gwen? Have you found good quarters?'

Gwen approached him. 'Yes, sir, I have engaged a bedroom at the other inn,' she said, in a whisper, lest any one should be listening. 'I have heard news, Sir Charles,' she added.

'News of your mistress? Speak! Out with it! Tell me what it is.'

'These are dreadful times, Sir Charles; there are curious ears everywhere,' whispered Gwen. 'I saw a man lingering by your door as I came in,' she added.

'Come hither.' Sir Charles moved further from the door, whereupon Gwen told him that in the bar parlour of the other inn men were saying that two maidens had been conveyed by Roundhead horsemen in the direction of Chepstow Castle.

'Are you certain that your mistress and my sister are the two ladies?' questioned the knight.

'I gathered as much from what was said,' replied Gwen, adding that she would hasten back to her inn to try to discover more.

'Sir Charles,' said Hugh, entering the room

after she had gone, 'I have seen yon gentlemen. They are the King's messengers, and, oddly enough, are on their way to Cefn Mably to see you. I have told them of your presence here, and they will come on presently to speak with you. They have a message for you from the King.'

'A message? Of what import?'

Hugh did not know. But the King's messengers came on presently, under cover of the darkness, and Sir Charles slipped out and met them under an old tree in the village street. Then they told him—

'The King desires your immediate return. He says you must allow nothing to let or hinder you from coming on to Raglan at once. He is in sore difficulties, and he bade me say he needs the faithful knight he made at Oxford.'

That was the message. Sir Charles was touched to the heart. That his King had sent for him in that way, after having given him a holiday, showed great and urgent need. But could he give up his search for Blanche, and go straight to the King? At first he thought he could not do it. After the messengers were gone, glad to be rid of their message without having to undergo the long ride to Cefn Mably, Sir Charles went up-stairs, lay down in the barely furnished guest-chamber, and, face to face with the query, wrestled with it a long time in vain. He had his own opinion about the King's

conduct, and was not a great admirer of Charles, and his heart was torn by love and pity for Blanche, who was in imminent danger, and who had given him the entire love of her young heart.

Nevertheless the King was the King, and the knight had sworn to obey him. Therefore the end of the matter was that, in the small hours of the morning, when the birds were calling to each other to awake and sing, he elected to go. All the same his heart was wrung to think of giving up the search for Blanche, and it was with a sorrowful countenance he told Gwen his decision in the matter in the morning.

The maid was furious. King or no King, that he should desert her mistress's cause for any other was to her the bitterest treason. She said nothing. Indeed, it would have been difficult for her to speak to him in a becoming manner. But he understood from the droop of her small head and her downcast eyes that she felt ashamed and distressed at his decision. Too proud to excuse himself to his retainer, he turned hastily away, biting his lips to hide his chagrin, and, forgetting that it would not do to take Gwen to Raglan, there to associate with lackeys and other men-servants, he rode on first, without another look at her.

Gwen rode on, too, doggedly, as if there were nothing else to be done. It was possible that even

yet her master might change his mind. Till then she would be patient.

In this way they went on until they reached Pontypool, where Sir Charles stopped at a small hostelry by the road side, and ordered dinner for himself and two knaves. Obliged to eat in the common room for lack of any other, they were partaking of cold meat and bread, together with two or three other travellers, when a stout, middle-aged Roundhead entered, asking to see Sir Charles Kemeys.

'Rowland Rowlands!' exclaimed Sir Charles. 'What do you want?' he asked, regarding him steadfastly.

The man answered with caution by asking a question. 'Do you want to find two ladies?'

'Ay. For pity's sake tell me where they are!'

'They are at an inn in this very place,' said the Roundhead. 'With a little help from me they escaped from the rascals who were carrying them off. And I brought them here, and was looking for a man to take charge of them.'

'It is surely Mistress Mansell and Mistress Kemeys of whom you speak?' asked Sir Charles, fearing the news was too good to be true.

'Ay, ay, the same. The ladies cling rarely together.'

'Mistress Kemeys, as you know, is my sister,' said Sir Charles, 'and Mistress Mansell is my

betrothed,' and, grasping the other's hand and shaking it heartily, he endeavoured to thank him.

The good Roundhead was only too pleased. A man of peace himself, he deplored the ravages and distress wrought by the Civil War, and was only too glad to help any one.

Sir Charles bade his followers bring the horses after him to the inn of which Master Rowlands spoke, and he went there at once with the Roundhead.

Oh, the bliss of that meeting with Blanche, after all they had been through!

Rowland Rowlands considerately drew Cecily Kemeys into another room, and left the small inn parlour to the lovers for at least ten minutes; then Cecily claimed her brother's attention.

'We must decide what to do, Charles,' she said. 'We have heard that Blanche and I are being sought for on every road between here and Cardiff. We are in great danger from many people, who, for the sake of the offered reward, will endeavour to seize us.'

'But I cannot return home with you,' said Sir Charles. 'For I have been sent for by the King.'

'You will not desert us, Charles?' cried Cecily, in alarm.

'My dear sister, I will do the best I can for you.' Yet he looked perplexed.

'Take us to Raglan,' suggested Blanche. 'My

father will be there with the King, so we shall be all right.'

'Ay,' said Rowland Rowlands, ''twould be the very thing, as the knaves will not look in that direction for the ladies.'

Sir Charles felt doubtful as to what the King would say about it, but hoped they might find Blanche's father first, and be able to consult with him. He therefore decided to take the ladies to Raglan Castle, where the King was staying with the Marquis of Worcester.

There was a touching meeting between Gwen and her mistress, after which, when horses were procured for the ladies, they all started for Raglan.

It happened that they met with the King before reaching the Castle. They came upon him quite suddenly, for he was out hunting that day, and in a moment of deep melancholy, having ridden apart from those who surrounded him, he had dismounted, and was standing mournfully alone, his beautiful horse with bowed head near him, as if he shared his master's sadness. His Majesty's sorrowful eyes were turned to the splendour of a glorious sunset, and his hands were meekly crossed upon his breast. The rays of the setting sun caught the diamonds studding his velvet coat and the gold band on his hat; they played about his sad face, to which they could not bring a smile, and touched his lips with tenderness.

It was a striking tableau, and one never to be forgotten.

'He is the King,' said Sir Charles to the girls who rode on each side of him. 'It is Charles himself.'

They all stopped short, and aroused by the cessation of their horses' steps, the lonely monarch turned to look upon them.

A smile came to his pale, sad face as he said gently, in clear, penetrating tones, 'Kemeys! Kemeys of Cefn Mably, is't you? Welcome are you to your King!'

Tossing his horse's reins to Hugh, Sir Charles, who had already dismounted, approached and bent his knee before the King.

The latter placed his hand upon the young knight's head. 'Faithful and true,' he said, gently. 'Faithful and true, as a Kemeys always is!' Then his Majesty's eyes fell upon the ladies, and he looked exceedingly surprised to see them there.

CHAPTER XIII

THE KING'S ORDERS

'Implements of war and subjugation are the last arguments to which Kings resort.'—PATRICK HENRY.

WHO are these?' asked the King, looking at Sir Charles Kemeys for an explanation.

'These,' answered the knight, 'are my sister and my *fiancée*.'

The next moment he assisted the girls to dismount, and presented them formally to the King.

The monarch smiled, gave them his hand to kiss in turns, and was extremely gracious, inquiring into the reason of their being there, and listening to the recital of their adventures with gentle courtesy.

'Methinks, Sir Charles,' said he, after hearing everything, 'you must have been greatly perturbed in mind before you could choose your duty to your King in preference to the pleasure of conveying these young ladies back to your home at Cefn Mably. How was it, man, that you could do it?' and he looked searchingly into the young man's clear blue eyes.

'I am a Kemeys,' was the proud answer. 'A Kemeys could not do otherwise.'

'I believe you,' said King Charles. 'In these sad days, when all is being torn from my grasp, when the Scottish army is marching South, with intent to attack me personally, when I wait here, apparently at play,'—a shadowy smile hovered about his face—'but in reality waiting for Irish reinforcements, and waiting so far in vain,'—and he sighed deeply—'at least I take comfort in the thought that in Wales, good hearts and true, like yours and your father's, are loyalty itself.'

'Your Majesty does not err. We and many others, too, will serve you to the death.'

'God bless you!' The King was visibly affected; he turned his head aside for a moment. Then, looking at the girls, he smiled and said to them, 'You see your King in the hour of his adversity, fair ladies. But you see also that he is not left alone—as he has been tempted to think he was—for now, in the person of this knight, your brother and your *fiancé*,'—he bowed slightly to the maidens—'he sees his loyal subjects yet. Sir Charles, I will talk with you more presently. Conduct these ladies to the castle. My hostess, fair Lady Somerset, the Marquis of Worcester's daughter-in-law, will receive them kindly. Tell her that is my wish, but indeed she needs not to be told, for she is hospitality itself, as you and

your father are loyalty. *Au revoir!*' he waved his hand.

Thereupon Sir Charles escorted the two girls through the wood, and on to the noble Castle of Raglan, where they were most hospitably received by Lady Somerset, who took great interest in their misfortunes, and had them placed in apartments near her own. Here, at Blanche Mansell's request, Gwen was allowed to join her. The poor girl cried for joy at being able to be alone with her mistress once more, and set about attending upon her joyfully.

Here also, to Blanche's great joy, she was visited by her father, on the return of the hunting party that evening.

Sir Lewis Mansell, although delighted to see his child, was distressed to hear of the calamities through which she had been passing whilst he thought her safely sheltered at Cefn Mably, and somewhat embarrassed by her presence as an uninvited guest at the already overcrowded castle.

The Marquis of Worcester and his family were exerting themselves to entertain their King in right princely fashion. Every part of their great castle was crowded to overflowing, and the days were filled with feasting, sports and entertainments. There were amongst the guests many fast, dissolute young men, who in this hour, when better counsellors were slain in battle, or had departed

from their King in anger, were gathered round King Charles, offering him injudicious or foolish advice, which he was sometimes weak enough to act upon.

Sir Lewis Mansell, with assiduity, had set himself the task of counteracting this pernicious influence, and he imagined it would hamper him somewhat to have to look after a maiden daughter as well —for he had no wish that she should be flirted with by the scapegraces and ne'er-do-wells he was endeavouring to keep from King Charles.

Blanche felt considerably hurt that her presence could be anything but an unmixed delight to her father; she did not realise the fact that to a nature like Sir Lewis Mansell's, whose every thought was for the King, private family relations were only of secondary importance, and she did not know his fears about herself. He had scanty attention to bestow on the matter of her betrothal to Sir Charles Kemeys, which appeared not to have reached him before—or perchance he had forgotten it—and that again was a grief to his daughter, who had no mother to share her confidence.

'Sir Charles Kemeys had better be thinking of war than of love at this present time,' said Sir Lewis Mansell. 'The King's throne is in danger. His Majesty needs every loyal heart and stout pair of hands to aid him. Even now, at my suggestion, he sent for Sir Charles Kemeys and other able men

to aid our noble host to keep this stronghold for the Royalist cause—in a word, for the King.'

'Then it was you who had Charles sent for, father; and if you had not, he would never have found me and Cecily, because he would have travelled the other way,' said Blanche, softly, thinking how providential it all was.

'Yes. 'Twas so. The Marquis grows old. His son, Lord Charles Somerset, is the virtual Governor of the castle, but more help is needed, for Raglan is certain to be attacked and besieged. The Marquis and his son have lent the King '—Sir Lewis dropped his voice to a whisper,—'they have lent the King a million crowns. Ay, and more. They have raised over a thousand foot soldiers, and five hundred horse. At this present time the castle here has a garrison of three hundred men. Those are great doings, my daughter.'

'And you have given the King all you possess —your money, your time, and your constant devotion,' said Blanche, tenderly.

'Yes, yes, child. It was my duty. I love King Charles. Others find fault, desert him, turn against him, fight him, but I—I love him more than home or——;' he was about to say 'child,' but stopped in his daughter's presence.

Blanche understood what he was thinking, and coloured a little as she said, gently, 'It is a rare love. And do you think, father—do you think

that the King reciprocates the feeling? He was kind and gracious to me, but he mentioned you not, although Charles uttered my name quite distinctly, whilst, on the other hand, the King dwelt much upon the tried loyalty of Sir Nicholas Kemeys.'

Sir Lewis was silent for a moment or two. He looked a little nonplussed.

'Cecily was there also,' said Blanche, 'and I should have liked her to have heard his Majesty praising you.'

'One or two of his Majesty's companions have a little turned his affection from me of late,' said Sir Lewis. 'However, it will come back. I know it will, because time will show him the truth. And, my dear, whilst you are here under the same roof as his sacred Majesty, you must not question his conduct.'

'Very well, father,' acquiesced Blanche, but she looked troubled. Instinctively she felt that the King was not worthy of the loving, whole-hearted devotion of her parent.

In a short time, however, the girl discovered that not to question the King's conduct was the rule of the whole house. Soon it became hers, too, quite willingly and without any reservations in her own mind, for in the course of the next few days the King took kindly notice of her and Cecily Kemeys, talking to them so pleasantly, and with

such winning confidence, that they found themselves at last quite under the spell of his personality.

Sir Charles Kemeys, who had never actually lived under the same roof as the King before, became daily more attached to him. In the mornings they played bowls together on the smooth green turf in the court near the King's apartments; and sometimes, perceiving the young knight's seriousness and how it fretted him to be at play when he was yearning to fight the foe, the King pointed out to him his innermost thoughts about political matters, revealing much of the deep melancholy which, as if in presentiment of the future, filled his soul. Sir Charles found the man more lovable than the King. There was something in the fallen monarch's gentle sadness that drew out all that was best and most chivalrous in his nature. And this feeling perforce distracted his attention from his *fiancée*.

'The King needs me, Blanche darling,' he would say, when they met in the castle grounds, and she would beg him for a little more of his company. 'The King needs me. I cannot stay. Perchance I will come later.' But she saw little of him.

''Tis always the King,' said Cecily, openly complaining. 'With every one it is the same, "The King!" "The King!"'

Yet even she fell under the spell of the monarch's fascination shortly afterwards, when he spent an hour talking to her of her father.

'Do you know, Blanche,' she said, presently, when they were alone, 'the King thinks very much of my father! He really seems to love him.'

'Well,' said Blanche, 'we each and all love the King. Our affection for him,' she added, 'is a love-chain, holding us all united to each other and to him.' She smiled, being now content; and even though she did not see much of Sir Charles, she was glad to be near him and near her father. At Raglan Castle she was safe from her enemy Reese.

But one morning Blanche's father entered her sitting-room with a very grave face. 'My child,' said he, 'the time has come for you to leave here, and I know not when we may meet again under the same roof. I am afraid I am but a sorry father for you, my dear; however, it is for the King I sacrifice even you!'—he broke down a little, for the first time in her knowledge.

'Oh, of course,' she said, gently clasping his hand in hers. 'The King must come first. Do not concern yourself about me, dear father. I shall be all right now—for my enemy Reese will have given up his search for me ere this.'

'If he has not, it will not matter, for you will

have a royal escort. It is with the King we are to journey. He goes to Cardiff, there to parley with some half-hearted Royalists and men who call themselves Clubmen, but are neither one thing nor another. We hope the King's personal influence will win them to our side. He has much charm of voice and manner, you know——'

'Yes, yes, he is fascinating at times,' Blanche struck in. 'I only wonder that so many can turn away from him and desert his cause.'

''Tis a scandal and a shame,' said Sir Lewis, with immense indignation. 'But to the point. I accompany the King and his retinue, and you and Mistress Cecily Kemeys will go with me as far as Cefn Mably, where we will once more leave you for a space.'

'That will be well,' agreed Blanche. 'I long to see dear Lady Jane again. Charles, of course, will accompany us;' she said the last words musingly, never doubting that it would be so.

Sir Lewis left her somewhat abruptly. It was not until afterwards that she remembered he had not answered her about Charles.

An hour later the latter met her by appointment in a shady lovers' walk in the castle grounds.

'It will rejoice me rarely, Charles,' said Blanche, after the first greetings had been exchanged—'it will rejoice me greatly to return to your home with you.'

'But, dear Blanche,' exclaimed the young man, 'did not Sir Lewis tell you that I am not going?'

'Not going!' cried the girl, in grieved amazement. 'Not going? What do you mean, Charles? Do you mean you are not going to Cardiff? Or that you are not going to return home to Cefn Mably?'

'Neither. I am going to remain here, to assist the Marquis and his son. They are anticipating a great attack from the enemy.'

'You are going to remain here!' cried Blanche, in immense distress. 'Oh, but, Charles, how can you leave me again. Charles!' Her tones were eloquent with distress, mingled with indignation.

'They are the King's orders. Sir Lewis is to go with his Majesty, you accompanying them as far as Cefn Mably, and I am to remain here, ready for the fighting.' Sir Charles said the last words more cheerfully. After the long inaction he was longing for the fray.

The girl's quick ears noticed his change of tone. 'You are not sorry, Charles,' she said, with reproach in her sweet voice.

'I am, sweetheart, and I am not,' he answered. 'It is this way. I am sorry not to go with you. But if the Scottish army and the English Parliamentarians combine to attack Raglan, we shall have splendid fighting!'

'Fighting! Fighting! The King and fight-

ing! 'Tis all your thought,' Blanche cried out, bitterly, half turning from him. 'Methinks,' she added, with a little sob, 'methinks I have lost the sweetheart who told me of his love in happier days.'

'Blanche dear!' Sir Charles implored, endeavouring to pacify her. 'My dear,' he said, 'God grant England's fight will soon be over! When it is, then we can talk of love and of our wedding-day—a blessed wedding-day for you and me.'

'God grant it be not a burying-day instead!' she sobbed. Then, clinging to him, she said, 'Oh, Charles! Dear Charles! You might be killed in the fighting, then what would your poor Blanche do? Oh, these are dreadful times! Why should men tear and rend each other like wolves?'

'My dear one,' whispered Charles, tenderly, trying to kiss her tears away. 'You must be brave.'

'Blanche! Blanche!' called Cecily, coming towards them along the lovers' walk, and pretending to be looking in another direction. 'Blanche dear, where are you—and Charles, too? I want him.'

They could not answer her at the moment, and indeed Charles turned almost resentfully towards his sister, who interrupted them at such an inopportune time.

Cecily was looking at poor Blanche with so much concern and sympathy that she did not notice him.

'Blanche dear,' she said, 'you must not weep so bitterly. You will unman Charles if you exhibit such weakness.'

'I cannot go away without him!' sobbed Blanche. 'I cannot leave him here!' She wrung her hands, distractedly.

'Now you are foolish, dear Blanche,' cried Cecily. 'A soldier's wife,—that is to be, at least, —ought to be brave. Remember it is the King's command that must be obeyed. I came to say that his Majesty has received news which causes him to decide to leave here early to-morrow morning. Lady Somerset wants you to come in, and prepare yourself for the journey, Blanche. Be sensible, dear. And bid Charles play the man.'

'Charles needs no bidding of mine, or yours,' said Blanche, struggling to regain her self-control. ''Tis only I who am so foolish, and it is because I love him so—I love him so!'

'Nevertheless, dearest, we must trust each other to the care of a higher Love,' the young knight said, gravely. 'You know we must think of the motto of my house, which soon, I trust, will be yours too, my Blanche. "God, and His grace!"'

'Yes, yes, I will—only—only it is hard,' faltered Blanche, and then she allowed Cecily to lead her away.

CHAPTER XIV

CAPTURED BY CRAFT

'We, who are ruled by principle, have no weapons with which to meet the villainy of rogues save those which are given us from above, weapons which, owing to the frailty of our nature, we often wield uncertainly.'—E. C. K.

IT was a fine cavalcade which rode away from Raglan in the bright morning sunshine.

The King graciously permitted Sir Charles Kemeys to ride by the side of his sister and *fiancée* instead of near his own person, and Cecily good-naturedly slipped behind, signing to Gwen to accompany her.

Thus for a short space of time, until they reached the town of Usk, the lovers were practically alone with each other. But their hearts were too full to allow them to talk much at first.

Presently, however, Blanche began, 'My heart fails me, Charles, when I think what a long time it may be before this wretched war is over and we shall be together always.'

'Time passes very quickly, dear one,' Sir Charles responded, looking at her tenderly, 'and you must

cheer up, and take the brightest view possible. A soldier's wife——'

'Oh, but I am not that,' interrupted Blanche, adding, 'I think if we were wed,'—her colour rose in a lovely blush as she spoke—'and I were really your wife, bearing your name, I could endure anything; but after all, Charles, I am only betrothed to you, and perchance something may happen, and we may never be married.'

'God forbid!' ejaculated her lover. 'My Blanche, talk not in that way. I cannot bear to think of such a contingency.'

'I cannot prevent the thought coming into my mind,' said Blanche, pensively. 'There is that wretched man Hugh Reese, whose one aim seems to be to marry me, whether I will or no.'

'No one can ever marry you against your will,' said Sir Charles, knitting his brows, and wondering for the first time if this gentle, fragile girl could ever be strong enough to stand firm against tremendous pressure.

'I would die rather than marry any one but you, dearest,' cried Blanche, looking up at him with such manifest affection in her sweet eyes as filled him with delight.

'Sweetheart,' he said, 'I may be able to run over to Cefn Mably, and then we can talk about being married—quite privately, you know, for in this time of war, when Great Britain is rent in two

between different factions, it would be unseemly to wed with any show, noise and splendour.'

'Oh yes, of course it would; I quite agree with you, dearest. But I should like to have your father and mother present. You know I would fain have dear Lady Jane by my side, because she is so sweet and tender to me, and I have no mother of my own.' Blanche's voice shook a little. 'You know, Charles,' she went on, 'it is when a girl marries that she feels to want her mother.'

'And I wish my brother William could be present. He is rather a good sort is William.'

'It happens that I have never met him. Is he like you, Charles?'

'Yes, rather. We have been often taken for each other. The King likes him very much. He told me the other day that he had written for him to come, and knows not why he delays to do so.'

'The country is so unsettled: no doubt travelling is difficult and hazardous.'

'Well, I hope no harm will come to good old Will. He is as brave—well, almost as brave as father, and no doubt he will be the second Lion of Glamorgan.'

'I would rather he were that than you,' said Blanche, 'because,' she smiled, 'methinks, dear, I should be afraid to wed a lion.'

Sir Charles laughed. 'The lion would be like a

lamb to you,' he said, giving her a glance of keen admiration.

Some lovers' talk followed, and then, returning to the subject of the wedding, Blanche said, 'Cecily must be at our marriage, Charles. I have an especial love for her.'

'Well, and so have I,' he responded. 'She is so bold and daring and so clever——'

'And affectionate,' struck in Blanche. 'I am sure she has a big, warm heart.'

'Yes; I am sure of it, too. Poor little Wild Bird! How fond she is of father!'

'And he of her. It is beautiful to see them together. It makes me wish sometimes——' Blanche stopped short with a sigh, and a glance in the direction in which her father was riding.

'Yes, sweetheart?' said Charles, tentatively.

'That my father cared as much about me,' the girl continued. 'I have always known, at least ever since I was a little child, that he only loves me up to a certain point——'

'A very high point, I should think.'

Blanche said nothing, but the tears rose to her eyes. 'Until I had your love, dearest,' she began, after a little while, 'I was strangely lonely and unloved.'

'Poor little girl!' said Charles, with deep feeling.

'I used to comfort myself with thinking of the love of God,' said Blanche, 'and it was a very

great comfort, but still I yearned for human love, given to me by one who felt as I did, and understood as I understood. Now God has given me your love, and I am deeply thankful.'

'You know you have it, whatever happens——'

He was interrupted. A gentleman rode up, and pointing to some houses which had just come into sight, he said, 'Look! This is Usk. I have been sent by the King to remind you that you will have to turn back now, Sir Charles.'

'Already! Why, how quickly we have come!'

'Time flies fast when one is in good company, Sir Charles,' and the gentleman glanced at the knight's lovely companion as he lifted his plumed hat.

'It does indeed. Well, I'm sorry.'

'See yonder, your friends are turning back,' and so saying the King's messenger rode on after his master.

'Blanche, my dear one, we must part,' Sir Charles said, with emotion.

Blanche tried to smile through the tears which would come.

The young man who loved her so dearly said 'Good-bye' very tenderly, and, in order to soften the parting, suggested that she should ride up a hill at one side of them, so that from its summit she would be able to watch him and his companions riding away.

'Methinks it will but prolong the parting,' Blanche said, sorrowfully. 'Still, I should like to do it.'

'Ay, do, dear one, 'twill be something to think about,' Sir Charles said; and then he was obliged to hurry away after his comrades, though he cast back several long looks at the dear girl he left behind him riding slowly up the hill.

Neither of them had any thought of danger for her, as upon the hill she was in sight of the King's cavalcade. Moreover Sir Charles signalled for Gwen to come forward and ride with her mistress.

As for Cecily, she scarcely noticed her brother's departure, for she was at the moment completely fascinated by the King, who had ridden over to her side and was conversing with her in his pleasant way.

Upon arriving at the top of the hill Blanche drew rein, and watched the gallant figure of her *fiancé* riding slowly away towards Raglan. The sun shone on him, illuminating every detail of his rich dress and handsome person.

'God bless him!' Blanche's lips murmured. 'He is one in a thousand, and I ought to be thankful that he loves me, and that one day in happier times I am to be his wife.'

'Dear mistress,' Gwen said, pressing near, 'methinks I heard voices a minute ago, proceeding from those larch-trees on the side of the hill; had

we not better rejoin your father and the King's retinue as speedily as possible?'

'One minute, Gwen. I can still see my dear knight, though his figure grows less in the distance,' said Blanche, straining her eyes to look after her *fiancé*.

Gradually he disappeared from view, and, with a deep-drawn sigh, she was about to turn her horse when a barefooted boy came riding up from the direction of the larch-trees.

'Lady! Lady!' he cried. 'Have pity, I beg!'

Gwen rode still nearer to her mistress, looking distrustfully at the lad. He was a wild, unkempt object, very thin, and dressed in tattered clothing. Moreover his face bore a cunning expression, not observed by Blanche, whose eyes were dim with unshed tears, but easily discernible by Gwen.

'Mistress, don't listen to him,' counselled Gwen.

But in the sadness filling Blanche's heart pity came readily, and therefore she said sweetly, 'My poor boy, what is the matter?'

'Lady,' he whined, 'it is for my poor master, and not for myself, I beg your pity. We fell among thieves as we rode through this neighbourhood, and they beat us and took our clothes, leaving us nothing but rags like these. See!' and he pointed to his ragged garments.

'You poor boy! What a shame!' Blanche said, feeling for her purse.

'And they beat my master,' continued the boy. 'And now he is very ill, dying, I think——'

'Dying? Oh, surely not! Where is he?'

'In a hut among those trees,' the boy answered, pointing to the larches. 'Lady, won't you come and see him? Do! He is so ill, and all the time he is calling for his mother, but she is not there.'

Blanche looked inclined to go. 'Oh, if that is the case,' she was beginning when Gwen interrupted.

'Mistress, you must not go! You must not!' Gwen implored.

'Come, lady,' entreated the boy, and, growing bolder, he added, 'My master is a gallant gentleman well known in these parts. Though he comes from Oxford, he is a son of the Lion of Glamorgan.'

'Indeed!' cried Blanche. 'Be quiet, Gwen. You forget yourself. I know what I am doing. I must inquire into this thing. Sir Charles was expecting his brother to arrive from Oxford. If he has indeed fallen among thieves, and lies ill in this wood close by——'

'He does, lady! he does, lady!' cried the boy, excitedly. 'Come! Come on, or he will die!'

'Is your master named Kemeys—Master William Kemeys?' asked Blanche.

'He is, lady! He is that!' cried the boy, wringing his hands and beginning to wail. 'He's dying!'

'I must go to him. Gwen, I must indeed,' Blanche declared.

'No, mistress! No. Let me go instead,' implored the maid.

Blanche did not hear her. She was already riding towards the larch-trees, accompanied by the boy who ran alongside her horse.

Gwen followed with drooping head, foreboding an unpleasant sequel to the adventure.

In the shadow of the trees Blanche was led by the boy along a narrow bridle-path, which turned and twisted several times, making the way appear interminable.

'It's just here, lady. In a minute, lady,' the boy protested, repeatedly, with what seemed to Gwen a ring of triumph in his tones.

Blanche was buoyed up with the belief that she was going to the succour of her beloved Charles's brother. Already she was planning that if he could possibly ride, he should have her horse, while she and Gwen rode Gwen's.

'Here is the hut, lady!' cried the boy, at length, as a turn of the path brought them in sight of a poor hovel, looking absolutely uninhabitable.

Blanche slid down from her saddle, and, bidding the boy hold her horse, entered the hut, for it was little more. It seemed quite dark inside, yet she heard a movement as if some one were present.

'Master Kemeys!' she called, softly; 'Master William Kemeys, are you there?'

No answer. Yet she had a feeling that there were more than one or two people in the place.

What did it mean? She turned towards the door, and the sound of laughter, which she more than suspected came from the boy who had brought her there, smote cruelly upon her ears. She was about to make her way to the door, when a rough hand caught hold of her, and a voice which she knew only too well said in her ear, 'Ha! my lady! I have got you at last!'

Blanche nearly swooned. It was the voice of Hugh Reese, her enemy.

Suddenly a window was uncovered, and the room was flooded with light. Then she perceived a little crowd of hostile faces inside the room, while from without came the sound of a bitter cry—Gwen's cry, she knew it was—followed by the noise of blows and a falling body.

'Master Reese,' she said, instantly, 'if I am your captive, my maid has done you no wrong. Be so good as to allow her to go free.'

'You know I am not good—therefore why should I?'

'Because I ask you.'

'That might avail if you loved me, but you do not.'

Blanche was silent, knowing that she hated him.

'Men, bind her hands behind her back!' Reese said, in tones of command.

'Do not touch me!' Blanche said, with unexpected spirit. 'I am the ward of Sir Nicholas Kemeys, the Lion of Glamorgan, who will richly avenge me should you hurt a hair of my head.'

Such was the majesty of her tone and demeanour as she spoke that for a moment the rough hands outstretched to bind her fell back inert. The men were speechless.

Reese struck in, with anger, 'Now, then, you cowards, are you going to obey me, or not?'

'You will not obey him,' said Blanche, again speaking in commanding tones to the little band of ne'er-do-wells who followed Reese, 'for if you do, Sir Nicholas Kemeys will exact a terrible vengeance——'

'His day is over! You need not now fear any Royalist,' struck in Reese, addressing his men.

'Moreover,' continued Blanche, still speaking in the high tone of command, 'all you men must understand that I am under the protection of God, to Whom I have prayed for help, and Whose Son said that not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our Father. He is the Lord of Life and Death.'

There was silence in the hovel. No one would touch her, except Reese, who himself proceeded to bind her hands and tie them behind her back. As he did so he swore at her and at his men.

Blanche was powerless now, for the pain of having her hands so roughly bound and the indignity she was suffering made her ill.

Dazed and half blinded by the tears forcing their way from her eyes, and giddy with pain, both mental and physical, she was lifted on to her horse, the bridle of which Reese tied to that of his own steed, which with the others had been concealed behind the hovel.

Reese's followers, grumbling and ill at ease, followed their leader as he rode with his captive out of the wood into the high road.

CHAPTER XV

IN CHEPSTOW CASTLE

'Yet I will temper so
Justice with mercy.'
MILTON.

THAT evening Hugh Reese stood before the Governor of Chepstow Castle, in order to report to him what he had been doing to further the cause of the Roundheads, he having been sent by the Governor, in the first instance, to spy out for him King Charles's movements.

'Well, Reese,' said the Governor, 'did you see the King?'

'Yes, your Excellency. His Majesty left Raglan Castle this morning early with a large following, including an escort of cavalry. The Marquis of Worcester, Sir Charles Kemeys and others rode with him as far as Usk, and then returned. In his party were ladies. I captured one, the daughter of a rank Royalist, and have brought her here.'

'What a brave man you are to capture a lady!' cried the Governor, sarcastically. 'Upon my word,' he laughed, 'you ought to marry her!'

'If it please you,' began Reese, eagerly, 'that is just what I want to do, your Excellency.'

The Governor, who was only joking, now looked displeased and frowned. Was the man daft? He had been sent out on political business, and was turning it into a love affair.

'Your Excellency,' said Reese, alarmed at the Governor's change of countenance, ''twas in this way. The lady, a daughter of Sir Lewis Mansell of Glamorgan, promised to marry me in happier times. Now, however, she wishes to be free of her promise, therefore I seized her while I had a chance.'

'But I did not promise to marry him,' cried Blanche, coming into the room hastily from the passage, where Reese had left her with his servants. 'Oh, sir,' she cried, appealing to the Governor, 'I crave your protection from this man.'

The Governor's wife, who was present, tried to soothe the excited girl.

'No one shall touch you,' she said, 'against your will. His Excellency fights with Royalist men, and not with Royalist maidens!' She was speaking to her husband as well as to Blanche, and the former rose to the occasion.

'You are safe enough in my castle, Mistress Mansell,' said he. ''Twas well for you that Lieutenant Reese brought you here.'

Reese looked very sullen, and his tone was more

unpleasant than usual as he said, 'She is one of those who are pitting themselves against the Lord's people, your Excellency. In the good old times of Scripture, the command from on High used to be, "Slay them all, men, women and children." You recollect, when Saul spared Agag, King of the Amalekites——'

'Cease your ramblings, fellow!' interrupted the Governor, angrily. 'You are a fit one to quote Scripture, you are!' The sneer in his voice was terrible. 'First, you want to wed this lady, who by the look of her seems a cut or two above you, then, when baulked in that, you want to slay her! Fie upon you!'

'May I speak, your Excellency?' cried Blanche. 'May I tell you how it happened that I was taken prisoner by this man?'

'Yes, you may. But calmly, madam, calmly. I like not tragedy scenes.'

'Go on, dear, tell us all.' It was the Governor's wife who spoke.

'When we left Raglan Castle,' Blanche went on, 'Sir Charles Kemeys, my *fiancé*, rode out with us as far as Usk, and when we parted from him I foolishly rode aside up a hill, the better to get a view of him as he rode away. My maid was with me, and we were in sight of the King's cavalcade. I watched Sir Charles go, and when I looked round again, a ragged boy stood by my horse speaking

to me, with sighs and tears. He told me that he and his master had fallen among thieves who had robbed and beaten them, and that his master lay dying in a hut near by, and he said his master was named Kemeys, that he was, in fact, Master William Kemeys, the son of Sir Nicholas Kemeys of Cefn Mably. Then I, who am but lately betrothed to Sir Charles, felt that I could not do less than visit his sick brother, and allowed the boy to lead me there. He did so, an 'twas a surprisingly long way; moreover, when I dismounted and entered the wretched hovel, I found no sick man, but was seized by this ruffian and his men!' She burst out into passionate weeping.

'Ho! So this is how you war with ladies, Reese!' cried the Governor, sternly. 'Shame upon you, man!'

The ugly look on Reese's face was intensified. Starting up, he cried, 'I declare, if this be Parliamentary treatment, I've a mind to try the other side!'

'Steady! steady! He who threatens us must be arrested!' The Governor laid his hand upon a small hand-bell standing on the table near him.

Reese immediately said something to him in low tones.

The Governor's countenance changed. His hand left the bell and stroked his beard. Reese went on speaking to him in a low tone for fully ten minutes.

Then the Governor spoke. 'Madam,' he said to Blanche, 'I fear 'tis my duty to detain you here as a prisoner.'

'No, no,' interrupted Blanche. 'I have not been taken in fair fight; I have been kidnapped, stolen away from my friends——'

'Silence!' The Governor's tones were loud and angry. It was not for any one, least of all a prisoner, to question his will.

'You have been over-persuaded by Master Reese,' hazarded Blanche, most unfortunately for her cause.

The Governor's rage at being supposed to be so weak as not to have a will of his own was very great.

'Silence!' he shouted, forgetting Blanche's ladyhood in his wrath.

'But I cannot keep silence!' cried Blanche, wringing her hands. 'If I am to be imprisoned here, exposed to the persecutions of that man——' She broke off, and then cried out lamentably, 'Oh, would that I were dead! Would that I were dead!'

Her eyes were wandering now from the sordid room to the fair river scene upon which the castle windows looked down. Her dark eyes shone unnaturally. She looked distraught. Long hours filled with poignant care, which would not let her rest: a day's hard riding, the last part with her

horse's bridle tied to Reese's, had broken her nerve and thrown her into a fever.

The Governor's wife could be silent no longer. 'Poor child! Poor suffering child!' she cried. Then, turning to her husband, she said, 'John, the lady is ill!' She took Blanche's hand tenderly in her own, adding, 'Her hand is burning hot. Let me have her. In my keeping she will be safe, quite safe.' She looked significantly at Reese, and then up at her husband's face, with eloquent eyes. 'Let me have her,' she repeated.

'Will you undertake to guard her safely, and produce her when required?' asked the Governor.

'I will.' The gentle tones were very firm.

'Then you may have her.'

The Governor's wife took Blanche's hand and led her away unresistingly, and walking as if she were in a dream.

CHAPTER XVI

AT CEFN MABLY

'And as the good Sir Nicholas still laboured in the west,
The thought of "Chepstow's fortress lost," still on his memory pressed.
And as he drove the Western men, with pike and gun, to drill,
Sleeping or waking, his one thought was foremost with him still.
And ever marked he in his mind the bravest of his men,
To go with him to win for Charles the Border keep again.'

OSRIC.

'WELCOME! Welcome home, my Wild Bird!' cried Sir Nicholas, folding his beloved daughter in his arms and kissing her tenderly. 'The lost is found!' he cried. 'I am a happy man!'

'Oh, father!' Cecily clung to him, weeping.

The King's cavalcade had gone to Cardiff. Sir Nicholas, who had ridden out a mile or two to meet his sovereign at the head of a numerous following, had been graciously received, and made to promise that he would come on to the town the next day, in order to assist the King with his influence and by his presence amongst the numerous

malcontents. Then his daughter had been handed over to him by the King himself, and he had received his 'Wild Bird' gratefully, as if Charles by his prowess had given her back to him. Now he had taken her home, and was bidding her welcome again as he lifted her from her saddle.

'Mistress Cecily has come home!' cried the green-liveried servants, pressing forward from all sides, for they loved her well.

'Cecily! dear Cecily has come home!' exclaimed her mother and sisters, hurrying down the great hall to receive her at the door.

Fair and beautiful were the fine old country mansion and its grounds, spreading out a brilliant prospect of gardens, woods, park, lake, and, to crown all, the winding river, with the view of the Bristol Channel in the distance.

But Cecily could scarcely see aught for her tears; her breast heaved, her heart was very full. She dreaded the next question, which came all too soon.

'Where is Blanche?' asked her sisters, wonderingly.

'Is not Blanche here also?' exclaimed Lady Jane.

'Ah, yes. I had forgotten her. Where is Blanche?' questioned Sir Nicholas, who had been far too much preoccupied with thoughts of the King and anxiety about what would happen on the morrow at Cardiff to remember her hitherto. 'And,

Wild Bird, my darling, why do you weep in the hour of your gladness?'

'It is so hateful to have lost her just when we were coming home!' cried Cecily, in lamentable tones. 'We had been through many dangers together, and then, just at the last, when we were on our way here, she was carried off by the enemy!'

'Carried off!' exclaimed Sir Nicholas, in loud, strident tones. 'What do you mean? How could she be carried off from the King's cavalcade?'

'Carried off by the enemy?' Lady Jane and her other daughters were crying with one voice. 'Cecily, what are you saying? Do you mean she has been carried off by Master Reese?'

'Ay, ay. It must be he; no one else would do it like that,' replied Cecily, relating quickly that Blanche left the rest of them, with Charles, when he had to return to Raglan Castle, 'and then rode up a hill, so that she might be able to watch him riding off. Many of those in the King's company saw her riding up the hill, but no one saw her disappear. No one could find her——'

'But where was Gwen?' demanded Sir Nicholas. 'That girl,' he added, 'had sense enough, ay, and as much strength of body as any lad, and her faithfulness was beyond doubt!'

'Oh,' replied Cecily, 'Gwen was nowhere to be seen at first. I induced Sir Lewis Mansell to exert

himself to stop the cavalcade. And he and the King gave orders to the men to look for Blanche and her maid. Then, at length, Gwen was found, coming out of a wretched hovel at a little distance, with her hands holding her head, and crying out that her mistress had been carried off by ruffians. Gwen had been stunned and left in the hovel for dead, but her mistress was taken away. Gwen stated that her mistress had ridden to the top of the hill in order to watch Sir Charles and the other gentlemen riding back to Raglan as long as possible, and then a ragged boy came up to her, with a long tale about a dying gentleman in a hut in the wood close by, declaring that the gentleman was Master William Kemeys, who had been attacked by robbers on his way towards his home. Against Gwen's advice, Blanche believed the tale, and allowed the boy to conduct her to the hut, which turned out to be a half-ruined hovel in the very depth of the wood. As soon as Blanche dismounted and stepped inside, she was seized, and Gwen, following after, heard shouts and a little cry from her mistress. Then, before she could do anything, a man, coming out, dragged her down from her saddle and stunned her, so that she knew no more. When she came to herself she was alone in the hovel.

'Besides taking her mistress the ruffians had also carried off Gwen's horse, and upon her rejoining us

another had to be found for her. Then she galloped about, distracted with grief, and looking in every direction for poor Blanche. She cried shame on Sir Lewis Mansell when, at last, he decided to come on with the King, instead of consenting to my strongly expressed wish that we three and a few men should linger about there, trying to find some trace of poor Blanche. He would not consent, though Blanche was his only daughter: and the King made me come on with them. I nearly ran away to remain with Gwen, who, of course, could not be induced to leave the place where Blanche had disappeared.'

'Good faithful Gwen!' exclaimed Lady Jane, who had listened in great distress.

'That girl was braver than her masters!' cried Sir Nicholas, forgetting for once to hold on to his motto that the King could do no wrong.

'But indeed it was little use remaining in Usk,' continued Cecily, 'for the wretches who took dear Blanche rode away with her rapidly towards the South—so much Gwen learnt from some peasants who had seen them.'

'But stay! I cannot understand,' protested Lady Jane. 'Surely Sir Lewis and the King did not come away until Blanche had been well searched for?'

'Of course not. King Charles is too chivalrous to do that. For about an hour and a half,' Cecily

said, 'every one made search for our dear Blanche in every direction, though in vain. It really seemed as if she had vanished from the face of the earth. Then the King became impatient, and Sir Lewis himself said it was dangerous for the King to linger there, and so he urged him to go on.'

'Blanche's father did that!' exclaimed several at once.

'Yes, yes. He is mad about the King. To his mind no one is worth considering except King Charles.'

Cecily spoke bitterly. She had learnt to be loyal, but Blanche was very dear, and she could not bear to think of her being left to her fate.

'They were all very angry with me,' Cecily went on, 'because, as I said, for some time I refused to go on with them. I am sure I should have stayed with Gwen, had not the King commanded me to come on with him.'

'And what could two maids have done? 'Twas a matter for men,' Sir Nicholas continued. 'My Wild Bird, your heart is brave enough, but 'twould not have availed you anything against bad men. But, tell me, where did Gwen mean to go when she moved on?'

'Towards the South, as she imagined for some reason that the ruffians carried off her mistress in that direction. She said that she should go on until she found her. She is half crazed about

her!' Cecily ended with another outburst of tears and sobs.

'Poor Charles!' said Lady Jane, thinking of her absent son, when they had soothed Cecily a little. 'Does he know of all this?'

'Gwen said if she could not find Blanche that she would make her way to Raglan Castle, and tell Sir Charles everything, and get him to go in search of her.'

'She is a brave and noble maiden,' said Sir Nicholas, with great heartiness. 'But what can a young woman do?' he added. He was lost in thought for a few minutes, during which none ventured to speak to him; then he said, 'I will send men out to search for Blanche—everything possible shall be done. I will offer a large reward for her recovery.'

'And Charles?' asked his wife, adding gently, 'Poor Charles ought to know what has happened.'

'Methinks, Jane,' said her husband, 'it would not be well to disturb his mind with our bad tidings. Without the King's permission he cannot leave his post at Raglan Castle, for his Majesty commanded him to stay there.'

They were all talking in the large drawing-room now, whither they had brought Cecily at once; and they made much of her, asking all about her adventures, of which she and Blanche had written them news in letters sent from Raglan by special

messengers. And, every now and then, as Cecily told her tale, she wept to think that Blanche, who had shared those terrible adventures and dangers, was alone now in the hands of the enemy.

'If only good Master Rowlands would come across her again,' said she, 'he might rescue her; he is a Roundhead, you know, but he is also a saint.'

Sir Nicholas did what he could in the way of sending out search-parties for Blanche Mansell; but that was difficult, for there were to be mass meetings at Cardiff the next day, and every man and every woman in the neighbourhood wished to be present, to see the King and hear him answer the complaints which were to be laid before him. Sir Nicholas was obliged to go, because of the King's command and the great influence he had over his fellow-countrymen in South Wales, which made it his bounden duty to be present.

He forbade his wife and daughters to leave the house, fearing that they, too, might be carried off. But Cecily and her sister Mary went through the secret passage down to the river, in order to look out there. 'For the chance,' said Cecily, 'that our Blanche might escape, and try to get back to us that way.'

However, when they passed out of the passage through the door at the other end, and, climbing out of the pit-like hole, looked cautiously all

around, they could perceive nothing of the slender girlish form they wished to see. Much disappointed, they hurried back into the passage, and held a whispered consultation, as to whether they dare leave the door ajar for Blanche's use, should she arrive later. With great reluctance, however, they came to the conclusion that they must not do it, for the risk to the house would be too great, as an enemy might get in that way, and, even if not so, Sir Nicholas's anger would be great if he learnt of it. So they fastened the door again and returned to the house, there to mourn over their helplessness.

More than ever at that time did Cecily wish she were a man, in order that she might go out into the world to seek for Blanche, and, if haply she found her, to fight for her rescue.

At Cardiff meanwhile much was happening. The King dined with the Governor, and afterwards met a vast number of Glamorganshire men at St. Fagan's. The country gentlemen of South Wales were on horseback, and the poorer countrymen were drawn up as if for battle, with a wing of horsemen on either side. King Charles, startled and concerned to see so strong a demonstration, approached them and made inquiry into their wishes.

The Glamorganshire men told their grievances, and proposed certain remedies. They wished to have the Governor of Cardiff removed, and a

Welshman put in his place; they wanted to choose their own officers, to have all the Roman Catholics sent out of their country, and to be excused paying the arrears of many impositions made by Colonel Gerard.

The King's answer was very gracious. He promised to grant all reasonable demands.

But the people would not be satisfied with his promises, which they had known to fail in the carrying-out. One man openly cited proofs of this. The Welshmen complained of Colonel Gerard's cruelty and injustice. Gerard himself forthwith upbraided the gentry of Glamorgan, and the King did not emphatically reprove him for it. The discontent and anger of the people increased.

The King returned to Cardiff to sleep, the people bivouacking in the open air.

The following day they sent ten gentlemen and ten countrymen as a deputation to the King, whilst they drew near to Cardiff, taking up their stand on a hill lying between the Taff and the Rhymney, where they stayed two or three days. In the end the King assented to their demands, though in an unsatisfactory manner; and they agreed to supply him with one thousand men and eight hundred pounds. Gerard was removed from command, and Sir Jacob Astley put in his place. The King, probably to appease Gerard, made him a baron, and unfortunately that caused the Welsh much

anger. The Governor was removed from Cardiff Castle, and Sir Richard Bassett appointed in his place.

Bad news from Pembrokeshire and from the West of England still further saddened the King. The Parliamentarians seemed almost everywhere successful, excepting with Montrose in the North.

After much anxious deliberation, his Majesty decided to leave Cardiff quietly at the head of a small force, in the night, and proceed Northwards.

Sir Nicholas Kemeys, whose generous heart was wrung by the King's distress, assured him at the parting that he, for his part, would do all that mortal man could do for him.

'When your Majesty sends the call,' he said, 'I shall be ready;' he was thinking more especially of Chepstow, which place he yearned to retake for the King, knowing as he did that Charles lamented its loss exceedingly.

After the King had gone, Sir Nicholas set to work again more diligently than ever to drill his mountaineers, ably assisted in that by a friend, one Thomas Lewis, a country squire in the neighbourhood.

Sir Nicholas's resolve to take Chepstow for the King was still more strengthened by tidings that reached him presently, to the effect that Blanche Mansell was confined in that castle.

CHAPTER XVII

A PLUCKY WELSH GIRL

'It is in great danger that we see great courage.'
REGNIER.

AFTER her mistress had been carried off, and after the departure of Sir Charles in the King's cavalcade, Gwen rode sadly away from the town of Usk, until she reached a deserted stone quarry in a field by the side of the road. She was very tired, having galloped distractedly hither and thither in search of her mistress. Her head ached, which was not surprising, after the blow which stunned her for a time; so she dismounted, tied her horse's bridle to the trunk of a young tree, and sat down on a big stone, to rest and think over what she should do.

'I must find my dear mistress, I must!' she said to herself. 'They have all deserted her except me!' and she looked mournfully around, with red-rimmed eyes that had no more tears to shed.

It was a gloriously fine day. The sky was of that deep Italian blue which one sees so rarely in this country. The soft wind stirred the earth, damp still with the showers of the previous night,

bringing out sweet odours of fresh soil and of the flowers and plants growing upon it. In the stone quarry, long since abandoned and much overgrown, there was abundant shade from the glaring sunlight; though the latter heightened and intensified the beauty of dark ground ivy, overhanging trees, and festoons of honeysuckle and woody nightshade.

Now and then a couple of butterflies flew about in the old quarry, or a robin flew down on to the stones near Gwen, cocking its head a little on one side, as it perceived the unwonted sight of a maiden in distress. At a few yards' distance a rabbit ran suddenly out of some brushwood and, pausing, looked on, as if also struck by the picture.

Notwithstanding her distress Gwen noticed everything around her, and the rural sights and sounds were consoling in a measure. She was herself a child of Nature, having almost lived out of doors until she entered Lady Jane's service, and since then stayed on at Cefn Mably or travelled with Mistress Blanche. It rested her to watch the butterflies, the birds, the rabbits, to feel the soft wind on her aching brow, and breathe the sweet scents of the plants. Even the crunching of her horse's teeth, as it ate the soft grass growing amongst the stones, was pleasant to her ears, and so was its snort of satisfaction every now and then.

'But I must be thinking what to do, and how

best to act for the recovery of my mistress,' she said to herself, resolutely, with a prayer in her heart for God's help in doing so.

She was far too sensible to imagine that she, riding about as a mounted Royalist maiden in distress, could hope either to further the ends she had in view, or to escape from molestation. She therefore concluded, after a little thought, that her wisest plan would be to change sides and become a Roundhead, in appearance at all events; for, besides the additional safety, if they thought her one of themselves, she might learn more of Reese's doings.

'That will be it,' she said to herself. 'I will make them think me a Roundhead!' But how to do it? that was the question. If she were a man, she would only need to have her hair cut short, and assume the Roundhead's sober garments. But as a maid, what could she do?

She knit her brows as she sat there on the stone, trying to think what the distinctive marks of Roundhead women were. They dressed very plainly, and they eschewed all dancing and revelry; in a word, they were generally—so Gwen thought—Puritans.

'I'll be a Puritan,' she said to herself, 'and if possible, I'll get into the very house where my mistress, my dear mistress, is. But oh, to find her first, that is the question!'

Five minutes later she had mounted again, and was riding carefully out of the stone quarry, intent upon getting further away from Usk before venturing to change her dress. She therefore rode on at a brisk rate until she came to Wentwood.

The sight of the noble trees in this great wood, stretching out to a vast extent on each side, made her pause, remembering that it would soon be night. She would have to stay somewhere, and, perceiving smoke rising from a farmhouse about a quarter of a mile away, she rode there, and begged humbly for a night's lodging.

Fortunately for her purpose, the master of the house was an old miser. When his wife demurred at taking in so very unusual a visitor as the solitary horsewoman, his eyes shone greedily as he asked in a curt way how much she would pay.

Gwen had only a few coins in her pocket, and she soon found it would require them all to satisfy the man's cupidity. That made her reflect that she had no money to aid her purpose. The horse, however, which belonged to the noble Marquis of Worcester, she considered she might use for her mistress, and be able to sell.

At the supper-table the old man discoursed on the value of money and the wisdom of laying it by instead of spending it. He lamented that his farm paid badly, and descanted on his kindness in taking

in a stranger without any references or recommendation.

Gwen studied him closely as he talked, and observed that he interlarded his very mercenary conversation with phrases taken from the Bible, and noticed, too, that his wife and daughters wore the sad-coloured Quaker garments of which she stood in need.

Gwen said, therefore, after supper, that she would like to do a stroke of business with him, which would yield him a good profit.

'Now that is the sort of thing I like,' he said. 'You are a sensible maiden. Let us proceed to business.' He rubbed his hands together in a manner which with him expressed great glee.

'I am inclined to part with my horse,' Gwen said, in her soft Welsh tones, 'if you, master, can give me the price which I shall consider good enough.'

The man's eyes twinkled and glittered avariciously. 'It is a sorry steed,' he said, 'worn out, and not worth much.'

'If you talk in that way of my good horse,' Gwen said, 'I shall simply have to ride him on to the next farmhouse, and sell him there for what he will fetch.'

'Nay, nay!' cried the old man. 'Griffith Griffiths shall not have him. Well now, come, let us have a little talk about it.'

The result of a long discussion about the horse and a good deal of haggling, was that, at length, Gwen succeeded in exchanging her horse for a complete outfit of his daughters' Quaker clothing, a couple of silver crowns, and the promise of a drive in his light cart through Wentwood and as far as Chepstow on the morrow.

Gwen rightly surmised that Hugh Reese might have taken her poor mistress to that town, which was possessed by the Roundheads.

On the morrow, therefore, with much grumbling from the old man, and some unpleasant looks on the part of his daughters, who did not enjoy having their scanty wardrobes impoverished—the chances of getting a new dress or bonnet from their father being remote—Gwen climbed into the cart, and was driven all the way to Chepstow by the farmer's son.

Tired out when she arrived there, Gwen made her way to an inn, and asked for a night's lodging and some supper. She sat in the common room, partaking of the much-needed refreshment, and taking a long time over it, as she listened to the conversation of those who came and went. Generally the talk was in Welsh, but sometimes it was in English, and then, although she knew that language much better than of old, she could not understand it quite so well as her native tongue. Occasionally she heard men speak of the Governor

of the town, calling him an able and experienced officer. Also the sweet graciousness of the Governor's wife was mentioned, but nothing was said of Reese, or of any lady prisoner. The chief topic was what would be taking place in Cardiff during the King's visit there.

Gwen slept that night in a little poorly furnished bedroom at the top of the house. Near her, in an adjoining attic, were two young maid-servants, who discoursed loudly of their own grievances in being overworked, and of the rights to which they imagined themselves entitled. Gwen sat up on her mattress by the side of the attic wall, with her ear pressed to the thin plaster and lath partition between the rooms, listening eagerly, and not ashamed of her eavesdropping. She thought—wrongly, of course—that the end she had in view justified the means, and said to herself, 'All is fair in love and war.'

After listening a long time, her patience was rewarded by overhearing one of the maids telling the other that her lover had spoken of a Roundhead officer, named Master Reese, having recently come and gone to the castle several times, on business with the Governor. This Reese, Gwen heard the girl say, was very rich, and lavish with money to people, when he wanted any service performed, however trifling. Tom, the maid's lover, trusted that some of this money would come

his way. That was all. But Gwen had learnt that she was right in thinking Reese probably had something to do with the Chepstow garrison.

Worn out with fatigue and trouble, when the maids ceased talking she lay down, fell asleep, and, notwithstanding her anxiety, slept until late in the morning. Then she arose, breakfasted in the common room, where she happened to be the only visitor, paid her bill, and asked to see the landlady.

'Indeed, mistress,' said that worthy person, bustling into the room, 'I hope that you have slept well, and that everything has been to your satisfaction?'

'Yes, indeed, thank you,' answered Gwen. Then she added, desperately, 'I want to stay longer in the town. I have paid my bill, but have very little money left. May I stay here as your servant?'

The landlady's countenance fell. She raised her hands and voice in protest.

'Indeed no,' she said; 'I couldn't do with a maid like you.'

'I can work very hard. I am not at all afraid to work,' protested Gwen.

The landlady shook her head. 'If you will excuse my saying it, mistress,' she said, 'you eat too long. "Slow at meat, slow at work" is a very true proverb.'

Gwen remembered the very long time she had sat over her supper the night before. The landlady imagined she had been eating all the time, and therefore thought as she did. Nothing Gwen could say would make her relent, or alter her decision, and she rather hurried the poor girl out of the house.

On leaving the inn Gwen went into the picturesque old town, where the sweet air blowing from the Severn and the Bristol Channel to the Wye, on the western bank of which Chepstow is situated, seemed to breathe fresh life into her.

With restored health came renewed courage, and, feeling bolder, she passed along the rocky street, looking at the houses and the old priory church, with its old-time monuments. But most of all she was attracted by the sight of the castle towering upon the summit of a great cliff, with the river flowing below. Gwen looked at the wide moat separating it from the land and the lofty towers beyond with a feeling of despair. If Reese had taken her lady there, how could she possibly reach her? It seemed impossible for a poor maid to get in there.

Most of the day Gwen spent in wandering about the neighbourhood of the castle, watching the soldiers passing in and out at the great entrance under the Norman arch guarded by two high towers.

How could she possibly get in there? By what means could she overcome the difficulties in her way? A poor maid, without money, with little strength, with only a great, overwhelming love for her dear mistress, what could she do? Was it any wonder that she sank down at last on a stone by the side of some waste land, crying as if her heart would break?

People spoke to her sometimes as they passed by, and one or two put money in her lap, but Gwen barely thanked them, and could confide in no one. At length, however, a good woman came up, who aroused the girl by scolding her heartily for lingering so long in the near neighbourhood of the soldiers.

'Shame on you, maiden!' she said, with emphasis. 'You ought to be at home helping your mother to mind the children, and not be playing Beauty in distress like that! Be gone instantly!'

At that Gwen got up, looked once more mournfully at the fortress which perchance already imprisoned her beloved mistress, and went sorrowfully back to the inn where she had slept the night before. Cold looks met her now, and the suspicious landlady declared that she must pay beforehand for bed and supper, if she required them.

Gwen gained nothing by the talk in the coffee-room as she ate, for it was all about the King and

Cardiff, and nothing was said about Reese, or the garrison at Chepstow Castle.

But it happened that night, as Gwen again listened to the maid-servants' talk in the next room, she heard words that thrilled her to the heart.

'That was a sad sight we saw to-day!' one maid exclaimed.

'Yes, it was indeed!' said the other. 'A pitiful sight!'

'Poor lady! Beautiful as an angel, and hustled along like that through the town to the castle by those rough soldiers. I felt like crying shame upon them, but feared to do so.'

'She was a prisoner, poor thing!'

'Yes, indeed. Poor young thing!'

'She was as pale as death!'

'Yes; and did you notice how dazed she looked when, once or twice, she glanced round as if in search of help?'

'Yes, poor lady! I should like to have run to her assistance. But then I was afraid of the soldiers.'

'And some of the onlookers might have resented it, for they seemed just as bitter against her.'

'Yes. One or two threw mud after her.'

'Indeed, yes, I saw them.'

'But they did not hit her.'

'No; her angel kept them off.'

'I shan't like that Tom Davis any more,' said

the other speaker. 'Do you know that he obtained two silver crowns from Master Reese for assisting to clear the road? There was such a crowd, and they wanted to get their prisoner through quickly. Tom thought he was in luck to be about just then, for it was all over in ten minutes!'

That was all Gwen heard, though she strained her ears, in the vain longing to learn the time when this happened, together with other particulars.

But the maid-servants were sleepy, and, after murmuring 'Good-night,' they evidently went to sleep, for all was still and silent.

Gwen felt certain that it was her mistress who had been taken to the castle during a part of the day when she was not by the entrance; and she determined that nothing should hinder her from also gaining admittance there.

Long she lay awake praying to God for help, and trying to think of some means whereby she might get into the castle. She fell asleep whilst still puzzling over the matter.

The next morning she was up early and out of doors, wandering about within view of the castle, looking hard at the windows, and wondering in which part of it her dear young mistress was lying. At times her heart sank to think of the improbability of her ever being able to effect an entrance into the formidable pile of buildings, and again she said to herself, 'Love will find a way. Poor Gwen

cannot be kept from her dear mistress,' and then she grew more hopeful.

About noon she told herself that her one talent, a very sweet contralto voice, and untrained but nevertheless great skill in singing, should be the means by which her entrance into the castle would become an accomplished fact.

Creeping as near as she could to the grand castle doorway, therefore, she stood up, a slight young figure in dull Quaker garments, and turning her pretty face towards the sentry, began to sing the grand old Welsh hymn, beginning—

'Yn y dyfroedd mawr a'r tonnau,
Nid oes neb a ddeil fy mhen,
Ond y ffyddlon Arch-offeiriad,
A fu farw ar y pren:'

('In the great and stormy waters,
There is none to raise my head—
But the faithful High Priest, Jesus,
Who was slaughtered in my stead.')

As Gwen sang the well-known words to the mournful Welsh tune *Eifionydd*, with great passion and fervour, in her sweet, clear voice, the soldiers gazed out wonderingly from the castle, marvelling at the sweetness of the singing, and also at the sight of the solitary maiden's slight and beautiful young figure. And others besides the soldiers came to the castle-windows to listen and look. It seemed to them as if it were an angel's voice, singing so wondrously. None who listened

that day ever forgot the power and pathos of that song.

The Governor's wife was one who heard it with emotion. She caused inquiries to be made, and upon ascertaining that it was a young Quaker maid (judging by her dress) who stood outside the castle singing, she sent servants to bring the maiden to her.

Gwen, who, having finished the hymn, was suffering a terrible reaction of feeling, and had sunk down on the ground, weeping hopelessly after her grand effort, was aroused by soldiers bearing the command of the Governor's lady to come to her forthwith in the castle.

Thus, to her immense gratification, Gwen was taken into Chepstow Castle, and escorted to the very place in one room of which her mistress was imprisoned.

Overcome by all the feelings surging through her mind, and completely won over by the sweetness of the gracious lady who received her with the utmost kindness, Gwen confided everything to her, beseeching her aid in the matter of gaining access to her dear mistress.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WORK OF A TRAITOR

'We must be brief when traitors brave the field.'
SHAKESPERE.

IT happened that Mrs. Jones, the wife of the Governor of Chepstow Castle, was just then exceedingly troubled about the young prisoner. The girl had been delirious all the night, and was in a high fever. She had called loudly for Charles many times during the long hours of darkness, sometimes, too, for Cecily; and again, with some insistence in her voice, for Gwen.

Upon hearing Gwen's story, therefore, Mrs. Jones believed it at once, and reflecting that it would be impossible for so young and simple a girl, although really a Royalist, to do any harm to the garrison by remaining in the castle, she engaged her at once as her own maid.

'Now, Gwen,' said she, very seriously, when the arrangement was made, 'you must know that I have undertaken to guard your mistress, and keep her near me for the present. It is a great responsibility I have assumed, and I have done it solely that I

may keep her safe from the numerous evils to which her stay here might expose her. I shall require you to promise you will not betray any secrets you may chance to overhear in this castle to the Royalists; also you must undertake to assist me in keeping your mistress here. Do you hear and mark what I say, Gwen?' Then she added, very gravely, 'You must on no account help Mistress Mansell to escape.'

Assist the Governor's wife to keep her mistress there! Not help her to escape! Gwen opened her blue eyes widely, struck dumb by the impossibility of doing this.

'Promise me,' said Mrs. Jones. 'Promise me, or you shall not go near the poor lady.'

Gwen promised all she asked.

Thus it came about that Blanche Mansell, at the crisis of her fever, was tended by loving hands and watched by eyes full of tenderness and compassion. In the worst paroxysm of delirious frenzy, Gwen's singing soothed her; and when at length consciousness returned, the first person that she saw was her devoted maid.

In her convalescence Gwen told Blanche how she had succeeded in obtaining access to her; whereupon the latter praised the brave girl for her cleverness and fidelity, and thanked her exceedingly for her devotion.

'It was God,' Gwen said, devoutly, 'it was God

Who helped me to get here. I prayed to Him! Oh, how I prayed! And then He put thoughts into my heart, and gave me strength to carry them out, and He made the Governor's wife pleased with my singing, and caused her to send for me and make me her maid, to serve you, my beloved mistress.'

'And it was God,' Blanche said, 'Who heard my many prayers for help and comfort; so He sent you to me, Gwen, and that was next best to being restored to my dear ones. We are in prison, Gwen, but we have each other;' and she gave the young maid a loving smile.

Gwen was delighted with that. 'Mistress,' she said, 'so long as I am with you, and able to comfort you, I care for little else,' and she kissed her young lady's hand again and again.

The days that followed went by monotonously enough, and the two, who had nothing to do but wait, would sit for hours by the window, when Blanche was well enough to rise, looking out towards the river, and watching the boats and barges passing up and down. Then, when the invalid became strong enough to go out, they were allowed to walk about in the garden within the second court of the castle. It was very pretty with autumnal flowers; but the girls sighed as they sat amongst them, because they were in captivity. For Gwen, too, was a captive, although ostensibly a maid to

the Governor's wife. The latter had told her plainly that she could not possibly be permitted to leave the castle.

'If only we could send a message to Sir Charles or to Sir Nicholas Kemeys,' said Blanche, sometimes, 'everything would be more endurable.'

'Ask Mrs. Jones to send one,' suggested Gwen. 'She is so good and kind I think she will do something.'

The Governor's wife, however, dared not communicate with leading Royalists like the Kemeyses. Gwen was untiring in her efforts to send some sort of a message, but for some time it was in vain.

At first Mrs. Jones had rigorously excluded Hugh Reese from proximity to Blanche. By and by, however, being much taken up with the Governor's need of her society, and imagining the girl safe in the castle garden, her vigilance was relaxed, and Reese, watching for his opportunity, found it, and approached the captive lady.

Coming forward, one day when she was in the garden, with great apparent humility, he prayed her forgiveness for all that had been amiss in his past conduct, declaring that so great was the love with which she had inspired him that it was not possible for him to control himself. In the future, he promised, he would be very different.

Blanche, fearing to offend him still further, and being withal of a sweet, forgiving nature, cut short

his apologies by saying, 'Nevertheless you did me immense harm. I will, however, endeavour to believe you are repentant, and in proof thereof, sir, I will ask of you a favour.'

Reese laid his hand upon his heart, and swore he would do her bidding, even though it should cost him his life.

'It will not do that,' said Blanche. 'What I desire is merely that you will be so kind as to refrain in future from addressing me. Sir,' she added, touchingly, perceiving his displeasure, 'I bear you no malice. What is past is past, and cannot be undone; but it has left a scar which time can never heal. I pray you leave me.'

Hugh Reese slunk away ashamed, for the time being.

It happened meanwhile that Gwen, watching for her mistress, entered into conversation with Master Reese's man-servant, who was in attendance on him. Finding out that his name was Tom Davis, she inquired if he were the Tom Davis who was engaged to a young lady at the 'Blue Pigeon' in the town.

The man smirked and smiled as he answered in the affirmative, adding that he had done odd jobs for Master Reese, and had pleased him so well that the latter had lately taken him into his service. 'Do you know my young lady?' he asked.

'Yes, yes,' answered Gwen. 'I have heard her

speak of you. She says you are powerfully fond of silver pieces.'

'Ay, ay,' he responded. ''Tis money makes the world go round.'

From that beginning Gwen induced the man to promise that for a considerable sum of money he would send a letter by special messenger to Cefn Mably.

Blanche wrote the letter to Sir Nicholas, and supplied the money that was promised;—for she had money on her person when she was seized, of which no one had deprived her. This letter Gwen contrived to hand over to the man, together with a written promise that if an answer could be brought back an additional payment should be made.

To their great joy, in a couple of weeks Tom handed to Gwen an answer for her mistress from Sir Nicholas. It was short and to the point.

'God bless you, my dear Blanche! It was good news to hear of your well-being, though ill to learn where you are. However, keep up your heart. Deliverance will come. We are sending word of your whereabouts to Charles. Our kind greeting to faithful Gwen, and love to you.'

'NICHOLAS KEMEYS.'

This letter Blanche read to Gwen, until they both knew it off by heart. It cheered them mightily

and filled their hearts with hope, which for many months was doomed to be ungratified.

Sir Nicholas Kemeys had to wait for the King's command before attacking and besieging Chepstow. Moreover, the men he trained and drilled, as often as not when ready for action, went over to the other side; for there was no denying the truth that the laws of Oliver Cromwell and the Parliament were just and equitable, and that under these laws good men and honest had a better chance of living in peace and prosperity than they had under the laws of the Stuarts.

Many stirring events happened in the kingdom whilst Blanche was shut up in Chepstow Castle, of which she sometimes heard from Mrs. Jones (whom in those days she learned to love dearly), and sometimes from Hugh Reese, who often visited her, in spite of her request to him not to do so. The man had great influence with the Governor, although the latter disliked him intensely, yet could not afford to quarrel with him. Being a just man, the Governor would not play into his hands in regard to his marrying Blanche Mansell. He told Reese plainly that the girl was in his wife's care, and, unless he could win her love, he should never have her for a wife. At the same time he bade his wife allow the officer opportunities for meeting Mistress Mansell.

So Hugh Reese came and went, often bringing

Blanche costly gifts, and always endeavouring to win her favour in one way or another.

But Blanche thought only of Sir Charles Kemeys, watching and praying for his coming.

She had heard of his prowess in the fight near Cardiff, when the Royalists were disastrously defeated. She feared that he would be among the slain, but it was not so, for, after some time of suspense, she heard of him in other places, fighting for his King.

Time passed on. The unhappy Civil War was still being waged, and Chepstow's banner was still that of the Parliament. Then tidings came that Cromwell, victorious everywhere, was marching southwards. It seemed, indeed, as if there was scanty hope for the Royalists in South Wales.

'It is no use,' said Hugh Reese to Blanche, one afternoon in October, 'it is no use whatever for you to hang on to a falling house. King Charles's day is over. 'Tis now Oliver Cromwell's day; and it were better policy on your part to wed one of his followers than——'

Blanche stopped him. 'Silence!' she said. 'I will hear no more in that strain. I will not talk with you if you go on so.'

Then the man, who, with all his faults, really loved her and showed great constancy in it, set himself to try another plan.

'Dear lady,' he said, entering her sitting-room one

day, where Gwen was in attendance as usual; 'dear lady, would it make any difference to you if your father laid his commands upon you to marry me?'

'My father never will,' said Blanche.

'If he did so, would you consent?' asked Reese, trying to conceal his eagerness.

Then Blanche, feeling confident that her father would never give his daughter to a Roundhead, and being anxious to be quit of Reese, answered, 'Yes. If my father bade me marry you, I would do so. Farewell, sir, for the present.'

She gathered up her work and left the room, while Reese went out at the other door, with a singular expression upon his face.

He knew a fact of which Blanche was unconscious. Her father was madder than ever about his allegiance to the King. His intellect, never very strong, had completely given way on that point. Men could make him do anything if they said it was for the King.

Sir Lewis was now staying at Cefn Mably with Sir Nicholas Kemeys. King Charles had shaken him off, and Sir Nicholas Kemeys had generously taken him in.

Reese was aware of this; he therefore went to Maes-y-bryn in a day or two, and thence sent a message to Sir Lewis Mansell, praying him to meet him on the King's business at a certain spot near the Rhymney.

Sir Lewis sent word back that he would come, and at the time appointed took the precaution of taking three or four of Sir Nicholas's armed men with him.

'I come from Chepstow,' said Hugh Reese, when they met. 'Do you know your daughter lies there?'

'Yes, yes,' answered the old man. 'We are going to rescue her one day when we have time.'

'I love her,' said Reese, bluntly. 'Will you give her to me to wed?'

Sir Lewis drew himself up proudly, exclaiming, in loud tones, 'No! no! Not so! Sooner would I see her dead, than wedded to a Roundhead!'

Reese smiled. Leaning forward, he said to the aged man, 'Do you know I am one of the garrison of Chepstow? I have charge of the Western Gate by night. Listen. If you will give me your daughter, I will open that gate at your bidding.'

'Will you?' cried the old man, eagerly. 'Will you?'

'Yes. That I will.'

The father paused a moment or two. To give his daughter to a traitor? That was bad, very bad. All that was best in him revolted from the idea. His head was in a whirl. He pressed his hands to it feverishly; he felt confused, unstrung.

''Tis for the King,' said the man, who knew his weakness.

For the King! The thought was overpowering to the poor bewildered brain. For the King! Could he refuse anything for him?

'Yes, yes. I will do it,' he cried, eagerly. 'If you open yon Western Gate for us by night, at an appointed time, you shall wed my daughter.'

'That is well. Mistress Blanche has promised me her hand if you will give your consent,' said the other, boldly.

They had now only the time and place to settle. They agreed to meet the following night for that purpose.

The very next morning, as events turned out, Sir Nicholas Kemeys received the long-expected summons from the King. The Earl of Lichfield wrote the letter:—

'Our Sovereign, brave Sir Nicholas, bids me send word to you that the Standard of the Parliament still waves over Chepstow Castle; yet he knows that nothing is deemed impossible by true, brave Welshmen. God speed you, mine ancient comrade! Farewell.

(Signed) 'LICHFIELD.'

It was enough for Sir Nicholas.

'I will do it!' he cried. 'I and my men will take Chepstow for the King!'

He looked proudly around. For this day he had waited. He felt equal to any effort.

But his family fell on their knees, imploring him not to do anything so rash and suicidal. Sir Nicholas, however, was obdurate; nothing would stay him, now that the King's word had come.

'For this day I have waited!' he said. 'I shall take Chepstow, or die!'

They saw that it would be impossible to move him, and rising, looked sorrowfully at his face, as those look on one whom they never expect to see again.

Sir Lewis Mansell entered—he was late down that morning—he looked fussy and important.

'Nicholas, a word with you alone,' he said. And, when the others had gone out, he told him that an officer of the Chepstow garrison would play into their hands and open a gate of the castle for them by night.

''Tis the hand of Providence which has caused this to happen just now!' cried Sir Nicholas, never asking what price his friend would have to pay for the favour, and not in the least suspecting the truth, even when Sir Lewis refused to answer questions just then.

That night Sir Lewis Mansell again met Hugh Reese, and told him the time and date at which they expected to stand before the Western Gate of Chepstow Castle.

After which each repeated his promise to the other, turning it into a very solemn vow.

CHAPTER XIX

CHEPSTOW CASTLE TAKEN BY THE ROYALISTS

'At length it came, the looked-for call;
  Glamorgan's hillsides rang
With shout and song from soldiers tall,
  Drum's beat and trumpet's clang!
And shout and song and lusty cheer
  Rose from the breast of Cavalier,
While maidens' hearts throbbed with the fear
  Their dearest ones should fall.'

OSRIC.

TWO days afterwards, in the fair May sunshine, a noble company of foot and horsemen were assembling below the grim battled gates of Cefn Mably. Down from the hills came the hardy mountaineers at the summons of Sir Nicholas, who had drilled them for this day; in from the neighbouring country rode squires and farmers, together with more numerous yeomen. Through them all, at the last moment, came dashing up Sir Charles Kemeys on a black charger. He had ridden far from another scene of warfare to join this enterprise, which lay so near his heart.

Sir Nicholas, mounted on a snow-white horse, smiled when he saw his son.

'At last, Charles!' said he. 'At last! For the King and thy lady, under God, we will do this thing.'

'Know you aught fresh of Blanche, my father?' asked Charles, stretching over his horse's neck, to speak low in his father's ear.

'Sir Lewis tells me she is living and well. But he is strangely reticent. I am unable to get aught from him, save that to-morrow night'—the baronet spoke low,—'to-morrow night Chepstow Castle's Western Gate will be opened for us at midnight.'

'Is that so? Do you think Blanche is doing that for us?' Sir Charles was strangely excited. He felt dazed—lost in amazement. How came Blanche to do a deed so stupendous?

'I never thought of that!' said Sir Nicholas, looking round for Sir Lewis Mansell. 'I'll ask her father. Oh, there he is!' He rode up to him, asking bluntly if it were his daughter Blanche who was going to let them into Chepstow. But Sir Lewis, anxious to conceal the truth, only answered vaguely, by hinting that she had a great deal to do with it.

A mighty shout arose at that moment from the assembled throng. 'Three cheers for brave Sir Nicholas!' Then, 'Three cheers for his Majesty the King!' cried the Kemeyses, father and son.

The shouts sounded and resounded far and wide. Some scattered Roundheads heard and trembled, saying, 'The King's cause is not over yet; we must take care of ourselves.'

Perhaps Blanche, kneeling in the beautiful chapel in Chepstow Castle—to which she was now allowed access—had some premonitions of the event, as she prayed that if it pleased God her dearest Charles should come, and that right quickly; for her heart was sore with waiting, and a new look of triumph in Reese's face filled her with great disquiet. Why was the man so glad? Why did he look so very certain that he would gain his wish? Was the Governor likely to yield? His wife said that he never would, but was he just beginning?

'My God, save me!' she prayed. 'Save me from the power of that man, whom my every instinct hates! Send help to me now! Now. Lest it come too late!'

Meanwhile Sir Nicholas Kemeys, his son Sir Charles, his friend Squire Lewis of St. Pierre, Sir Lewis Mansell, and many others, rode hard for Chepstow, never pausing by the way.

Just as the dawn was breaking in the eastern sky, they drew near the goal. It was close upon the hour at which the Western Gate of the castle was to be thrown open to them. Would it indeed be so? Would the friend to them, or possibly the traitor to the Roundheads, keep his promise to Sir

Lewis Mansell? Or had it been a ruse to lure them on to their destruction?

Sir Nicholas and his friends felt it an anxious moment, when in the grey light they came in sight of the castle, with the Standard of the Parliament waving high above its embattled tower.

'Twill have to come down!' cried the baronet, grimly. 'My friends,'—he turned to his companions and those who followed him—'yonder we must plant the Standard of the King! Follow me!' And again setting spurs to his horse, he dashed onward to the Western Gate.

There was no time for further reflection, no time for doubts or fears; the step was taken; they were already seen by the garrison.

'For God and the King!' they shouted, loudly, as they sped round to the Western Gate.

The very moment they reached it the great barred gate swung open, and the Cavaliers poured in, armed to the teeth.

The guard at the gate made submission at once, and stood passive, with their officer Reese at their head. Not so other officers and soldiers, who, roused from their beds, rushed forward to resist the entrance of the Royalists.

Then suddenly a great shout arose. It was the old, old cry, 'God save the King!' And, looking upwards, all were startled to see that already the

Royal colours waved above the tower, where the Standard of the Parliament had been.

Sir Charles Kemeys it was who, sword in hand, followed by a little band of men, had fought his way to the tower-top, torn down the rebel Standard and set up that of the King.

There was not much more fighting after that. The Royalists obtained an easy victory, being loudly cheered outside in the town by the loyal burghers, who had been longing to see them come.

Sir Charles Kemeys was the first to find Blanche Mansell in the chapel in the third court of the castle. Thither she, the Governor's wife, and Gwen, had fled for safety, when the noise of the fighting and the great shouts had aroused them from their slumbers, and brought them quickly down-stairs.

Mrs. Jones gave a cry of alarm at the entrance of an armed knight. But Blanche ran straight into his arms.

'Oh, Charles! Dear Charles! I have waited for this day—so long! So very long!'

'And I too, sweet one,' he whispered, kissing her silken hair and little ear—her face was hidden in his breast.

'I have come to you now—never to go away from you again—though I shall take you out of this,' he added, glancing hastily around.

'Never? Oh! Charles, did you say Never?'

She lifted her face to look into his true blue eyes.

'Yes; never.' That was all he could say just then, for he had to speak to Gwen, and reassure Mrs. Jones, who was terribly afraid.

Blanche informed Sir Charles Kemeys at once how deeply indebted she was to the good lady and the Governor for their true kindness and hospitality.

Sir Charles, having thanked Mrs. Jones warmly, said he would represent this matter to his father and the other Royalist gentlemen, and, leaving the ladies in the chapel, guarded by one or two of his men, he proceeded forthwith to his father's presence.

Sir Nicholas sat in the great hall of the castle, in the midst of Cavaliers, whilst before him stood the vanquished Governor, his head sunk upon his breast, his eyes full of despair. Near him stood Reese, an ugly scowl upon his brow.

'It is true,' Sir Nicholas was saying to the Governor, 'we have not taken this castle in fair fight—the gate was opened to us by one inside—one of yourselves!'

The Governor lifted his head and looked at Reese. 'How was it?' he demanded. 'The gate was in your charge.'

Reese looked at Sir Lewis Mansell, and smiled meaningly.

'I did it,' he said, 'for a consideration.'

'Traitor!' hissed the Governor.

Even the Royalists looked disapprovingly at Reese. Sir Nicholas signed to an officer by his side. 'Keep your eye on him,' he said. 'He must not leave the castle. This will have to be inquired into anon.'

Sir Charles, coming forward, in a low tone informed his father of what Blanche had told him of the kindness of the Governor and his wife.

'This will save them,' said Sir Nicholas, immediately acquainting the other gentlemen with the facts.

After some animated discussion it was unanimously agreed that the Governor, his wife, and the whole garrison should be allowed to leave the castle and the town, unarmed. Only Reese was detained for further inquiry.

Sir Nicholas sat down then, and wrote to the Earl of Lichfield to afford him the glad news that Chepstow was recovered for the King.

Then Sir Nicholas's attention was urgently called to a very different matter.

CHAPTER XX

THE SIEGE OF CHEPSTOW

'The fight now o'er, and hushed the battle-din,
Kemeys looked round, the castle walls within;
At his command the gory slain they throw
Into the current of the Wye below,
Anon, 'gainst new surprises well to guard,
He placed his men to keep good watch and ward,
Lest on them stealthily the foe should creep;
For, 'gainst all odds, he was resolved to keep
The fortress, nor surrender till the King,
At his appeal, should strength and succour bring.'

OSRIC.

'IT is you, my Blanche? It is you who have won this great victory for the King!' cried Sir Lewis Mansell, folding his daughter in his arms, and looking fondly into her astonished face. He, too, had at last found her in the chapel.

'My dear father, I have had nothing at all to do with it!' cried Blanche, looking at him with alarm.

'Look you here,' cried the old man; 'see now, it was for love of you that a Roundhead officer opened the gate, and I promised him that you should marry him if—if he did it. Why, child, what is the matter?'

Blanche drew herself away from him, shaking off his clinging arms. 'Who—who is the man?' she asked, faintly, though indeed she knew.

'His name is Reese—Hugh Reese. He is an officer, and I think a gentleman, rich too; and now, of course, he will be a Royalist—made one for love of thee!' Sir Lewis finished quite triumphantly.

'He is my enemy, father, my cruel enemy, and —and I hate him!' cried Blanche, vehemently.

Sir Lewis looked quite upset. He sat down on a seat near, and held his head, as if to still its throbbing. 'Why, the man told me that you desired to wed him, and was only waiting for my permission.'

'He told you a lie. He is my bitter enemy.' And now the tears came streaming down the girl's face.

Sir Lewis Mansell was in great perplexity and distress.

'Blanche, my dear,' he said, rising, 'I have been deceived by the fellow, who nevertheless has done our cause a very good turn; still, I think, having gained it by a lie, he cannot claim the fulfilment of our compact. I will hie me to Sir Nicholas, who is a wise man, and withal a man of honour; he will advise us in this matter.'

'Yes, yes, father, go tell Sir Nicholas. And be sure of this, whatever you have promised, I will

never, never, never wed that wicked, lying Hugh Reese!'

Sir Nicholas treated the matter shortly and with a high hand.

'The villain Reese deceived you, my friend,' said he, 'and it is meet that he tastes what such conduct merits. He shall be conveyed to the castle dungeon, until such time as we shall please.' This was accordingly done.

As for Blanche, Sir Nicholas sent his son Charles to console her, which he did quite successfully, making it clear to her that she could not consider herself at all bound by her father's promise.

There were many other matters which then claimed Sir Nicholas's attention. His men were carefully arranged to guard every point and watch in every direction. He was aware that rumours were circulating in Chepstow that Cromwell was coming there with his army, and he feared that tidings of the overthrow of the Parliamentary garrison would greatly hasten his advent.

For three days, however, not a sign of advancing troops was to be seen. On the fourth day, the baronet stood on the highest wall alone, scanning the face of the land. As he did so he heard a faint sound, as of dismal, wailing chanting in the distance. He stood gazing hard on the road to Chepstow from the east, and then, above the hill of Tutshill, he perceived troops of armed men

coming marching on, with measured tread and martial music. They were no Cavaliers, who sung those dirgelike hymns; they were foes. The hour was approaching when he must either conquer that great force or die.

Hastening to his men, he went round the walls and fortifications, seeing that all were in their places, his own son in one of the most important and dangerous. Sir Nicholas spoke cheerily to all; to none did he confess the fears that filled his mind. He had only one hundred and twenty men in all, and their adversaries seemed legion. But he pointed to the Royal banner waving in the air, and bade all join him in the battle cry, 'God save the King!'

As Sir Nicholas looked down on the crowd of armed Roundheads the singing ceased, and a trumpet was blown loudly. Then one rode forward, demanding that they should yield the castle before any more lives were lost.

'Tell Cromwell,' Sir Nicholas replied, defiantly, 'that we are not his slaves! We do not parley with rebel Roundheads; we will answer with our swords and guns. We hold this place for Charles, our rightful King, and will defend it to our dying breath!'

The reply was a bullet whizzing past the speaker's head. That was the signal for hostilities to begin, and soon the rocks re-echoed with

the peals of musketry, whilst cannon worked dreadful havoc amongst the Roundheads.

At first Blanche and Gwen remained quietly in the chapel, praying for their loved ones and their friends. Then it occurred to them that they might at least spend their time in tending the wounded, and with the help of the few other women in the castle, they crept up to the walls and brought wounded soldiers, one by one, into a place of safety, where they could bind up their wounds and give them water.

Night came at length, and the fighting ceased for a while, although those without kept jealous watch round the castle—they had already taken the town—lest those within should endeavour to flee out.

Cromwell, finding that the siege was likely to take some time, had gone on with some of his men to Pembroke Castle, leaving Colonel Ewer and a sufficient force to take the Castle of Chepstow.

In the castle Sir Nicholas and his friends kept weary vigils, their hearts too full for sleep. Several of their friends and retainers were dead, Sir Lewis Mansell among the number. Sir Charles Kemeys carried the body to a soldier's bed, and laid it gently down, covering his face with a strip of the Royal colours. But he could not leave his post long enough to seek out Blanche and tell her. She would know sufficiently soon, he told himself.

As he stood on his lonely post of observation, a little later, watching the camp fires below, the sound of a light footfall behind made him turn his head, and he saw Gwen with a jug and covered plate in her hand.

'Sir Charles,' she said, softly, 'my mistress has sent you these, with her dear love, praying you to eat and drink for her sake, even if you have no appetite.'

'How is she, Gwen?' asked Sir Charles, eagerly, taking a deep draught of the strong coffee she brought him, for his throat was parched and dry.

'She keeps up bravely, Sir Charles,' answered Gwen. Then she told him how they had been employed, and that all the time they were trusting he was unhurt.

He ate the sandwiches she had brought him silently for a few minutes, then he said, 'I think you must have often wondered how I could leave your sweet mistress so long here, instead of risking my neck by endeavouring single-handed to rescue her?'

Gwen was silent. She had indeed wondered often; and more, had blamed him in her heart.

'It was love,' said the knight, softly, 'love for my King. He won my love completely, and he trusted me to do his bidding. That love and trust had many a conflict with my deep drawing towards Mistress Blanche, whom also I loved dearly, as you

know. But at length I have come to her. Perchance at least we can die together.'

Gwen moaned. It seemed a likely probability.

'Look, Gwen!' The knight pointed to many lights below. 'Some time ago I saw a large number of the enemy marching away; but they have left all those men—and we are so few!' He sighed. 'What I want you to do, Gwen,' said he, earnestly, 'is to guard your mistress. You are a brave girl and a clever one: will you do it?'

'Yes,' she answered. 'Yes, Sir Charles, I will protect her, if need be, with my life.'

'God grant that that may not be necessary!' he said; and then Gwen went below, with a very solemn and very sacred feeling in her heart.

CHAPTER XXI

NO SURRENDER

'But stout Kemeys, though terrors closed him round,
Still loyal stood—still bravely held his ground—
Still watched and hoped that each new day would bring
The longed-for help and succour from the King!'

OSRIC.

'SIR NICHOLAS, there is no ammunition left.'

'What do you say, Lewis?'

'That this day's work has used up every vestige of ammunition that we had!' And Squire Lewis, Sir Nicholas's friend and comrade, groaned.

'Our plight is sore indeed!' cried Sir Nicholas. Another day's hard fighting had used up the sinews of war. What should they do?

'Lewis, have you seen it for yourself?'

'Yes, that I have. I went to overhaul our store, and found the powder barrels empty. In fact, there is no more ammunition of any sort. All is spent.'

'All? All?'

'Yes. All.'

Sir Nicholas went to look for himself, but

found it was indeed as his friend said. He returned to the wall, and looked again most disconsolately at the overwhelming numbers of the enemy.

'We must surrender,' said Squire Lewis. 'See how strong they are! If we were well armed we could not stand against them. What can we do cooped up in these strong walls, with no ammunition for our cannon and for our guns?'

'We will not surrender,' said Sir Nicholas, doggedly. 'We will keep this castle for our King——'

'But if it be impossible?' interrupted the other. 'You see the enemy is too strong for us. They have now brought cannon from Gloucester. To-morrow, if we do not yield, these will belch out fire upon our walls. They will make a breach sooner or later, and the Roundheads will rush in.'

'I will not surrender!'

'But, my dear fellow, consider the lives of our faithful men, many of whom are married. Will you make their wives widows and their children fatherless, by continuing this desperate defence?'

''Tis for the King!' cried Sir Nicholas. 'I will hold this strong fortress for him until—until death!'

Squire Lewis went out and sought for Blanche Mansell, hoping that a woman would prevail where he had failed.

Blanche went to Sir Nicholas, put her soft hands

in his, and timidly kissed his rugged brow. 'Dear Sir Nicholas, take me home to Lady Jane,' she pleaded.

He shook his head. 'You forget, child,' said he, 'the King has sent me here. I have taken this stronghold for him, and I must defend it from his foes.'

'It is dear Lady Jane I want you to think of,' went on Blanche, 'and your "Wild Bird"——'

'Hush!' He laid his hand upon her lips. 'Tempt me not, child, I must do my duty.'

Blanche tried a little longer, but could not bend that iron will. The following day the cannon from Gloucester poured a deadly fire upon the castle walls, annihilating the battlements of the towers, and damaging many a corner.

'Mistress,' said Gwen, entering the great hall the next day, where Blanche was ministering to the wounded; 'mistress, they tell me there is no food now—there is nothing left.'

'Nothing?' exclaimed Blanche. 'No food at all? But cannot more be obtained anywhere?'

'No, mistress. The town, you know, is occupied by the enemy. All food supplies are there.'

It was indeed so. Starvation stared the brave defenders in the face. Soon the whisper ran round amongst the men, 'We have no food.' One carried the news to Sir Nicholas. The look on his face was terrible when he heard it, but he only

said, with forced cheerfulness, that the King would be sending them succour soon.

The pangs of hunger are hard to bear. Strong men grew pale-looking and wan. Blanche felt ill, and could scarcely walk about amongst her patients. She and Gwen had not tasted food since they heard there were no more supplies. What crumbs there were, they both declared, must be shared amongst the fighting men.

Sir Charles, seeing them thus one day, felt smitten to the heart, and went at once to his father.

'Father,' said he, 'I agree with you that we must not surrender.'

'My son, give me your hand!' cried Sir Nicholas, and wrung it hard.

'We must not admit the foe, we must not surrender,' continued Sir Charles, 'but, my dear father, we can flee. We have one way of escape. The men have got a boat in a safe hiding-place on the river, moored to the castle side.' He described the place. 'They have had it there some days. My dear father, give the order that they and we may escape in it.'

Sir Nicholas gave him a searching look. 'You can go, Charles,' said he. 'Better that than death for you. And you can take Blanche Mansell and her maid, and the men may go. I will give them the order.'

'And you, father, you will come?'

'I? No, no. I never ran from a foe in my life, and it is too late to begin now. Some one will have to stay with the wounded—'tis fitting I should, who have brought them to this pass.'

He was firm on this point. Sir Charles was unable to move him, neither could Blanche, though she tried hard, thinking of Lady Jane and his daughters, especially Cecily, whom she loved best.

Late that evening Sir Nicholas bade his men good-bye, and watched them go down, one by one, to the place where the boat was kept. Many a man besought him to come too; but he only shook his head, saying that he must remain with the wounded.

He stood alone, when they had gone, with great tears in his eyes. He had done his best, and failed. Well, he would not open the castle gates; the enemy would have to break a way in for themselves. He went to the big hall, to soothe the wounded with kind words.

To his great surprise Blanche Mansell was there, in her place among the sufferers, and Gwen was busy near her, handing round cups of water, which were all they had to give their patients, except some medicines and sleeping draughts.

'Blanche!' Sir Nicholas called her to him. 'You here! What does this mean?'

'I could not leave you and these,' answered the girl, simply; 'and, besides,' she hurried on, anxious

not to obtain more credit than was her due, 'the Roundheads will not harm helpless women. I never heard of them doing it to decent women folk who fight not—that is, save Reese, and he would be as bad, were he a Royalist, for it is in the man's nature.'

'Yes, yes. I don't think mortal men could harm thee, dear maiden, save yon wretch. Well, he has gone with better men.'

'Charles is returning,' said Blanche, quickly. 'He has only gone to see the men off. But——' She broke off, startled by the sight of a number of men, with wild looks and gestures, who had entered the further end of the big hall.

Sir Nicholas saw them too, and wheeled round fiercely, with his hand upon his sword. But the next instant he perceived that these were no enemies, but his own men returned to him.

''Tis gone. 'Tis gone!' they cried. 'Alas, Sir Nicholas! Alas, Governor! Our boat has gone!'[1]

'Gone?' cried Sir Nicholas. 'Gone? What, the boat you hid so securely?'

'Yes, yes,' they answered; 'it is gone! Some foul rebel has espied it, and has swum over and cut the rope cable that held it!'

It was indeed so. The last hope of the poor famished soldiers was destroyed. Just as they were

[1] A fact.

thinking of returning home to their wives and families; just as the most blessed hopes were buoying up their hearts, they had to bear the crushing blow of finding that the enemy had crossed the river and cut off their last chance of deliverance.

'My dear men, my dear comrades,' said Sir Nicholas, looking around on the despairing faces gathered about the entrance of the great hall, 'our case is very sad! But it might have been worse. We are defeated, but not disgraced. We have done our duty. We have won this fortress, and kept it as long as we were able. Without ammunition, without food, we must die. But we will die in harness. Each man shall go back to his post on the walls.' Then he cried loudly, with a gesture of command, 'Back to your places, my men! To the walls, my comrades!'

The men looked at him and at each other. A murmur arose that it would be far better to surrender. The love of life is strong. The men, though loyal and staunch at heart, wavered, nay more, began to speak mutinously, disrespectfully, rebelliously.

Then Sir Charles Kemeys, who had come silently into the hall the last of all, spoke up sharply, bidding the men go to their places on the walls.

'It was necessary to speak firmly,' said Sir Charles to Blanche. 'Look at my father. It would have killed him to argue with the men. All

the same, I will try to persuade him to surrender for their sakes.'

'He never will,' said Blanche. 'You cannot make him yield.' She staggered while she spoke, and would have fallen, had not Sir Charles thrown his arm round her.

'You are ill, dearest,' he said, tenderly. 'Gwen, look at your mistress. She is very ill.'

'It is from want of sleep, and still more from want of food,' said Gwen, wringing her hands.

'I will take her to her room. Lead the way, Gwen,' exclaimed the knight, taking up his dear lady in his arms, and carrying her out of the hall.

Straight to her bedroom he bore her, laying her tenderly upon her bed. Then giving instructions to Gwen how to bring her round, he returned to his father.

The next morning the besiegers turned their batteries on the walls, and at about twelve o'clock a hole was made in one of them, so low that a man could walk into it.

Squire Lewis now came on the wall and spoke to some gentlemen of Glamorgan whom he knew.

'I am willing to yield to mercy,' he said.

Sir Nicholas, however, refused to submit to the terms Squire Lewis thought reasonable. At last the latter prevailed upon him to speak with Colonel Ewer on the drawbridge.

'My desire,' said the vanquished hero, 'is that

I, with all my officers and soldiers, may march from the castle with our arms and accoutrements.'

'I will give no other terms than these,' said Colonel Ewer, in reply. 'You and all that are with you must submit unto mercy.'

'That will not I do!' cried Sir Nicholas, incensed.

Colonel Ewer did not believe him. Drawing off his soldiers, he bade them stand to their arms, and waited.

'They may wait for ever!' cried Sir Nicholas, 'I will not go out on those terms.'

But his soldiers deserted him, and ran out at the breach in the walls.

Seeing this, Colonel Ewer's men rushed in at the same place, and made haste to seize the castle.[1]

Sir Charles Kemeys, standing at his father's side, had in vain tried to persuade him to yield to the conqueror's terms; the old man was obdurate, and his son's labour was in vain; at the same time it so occupied Sir Charles as to prevent his going to look after Blanche, who was still very ill.

Mistress and maid were together in the former's bedroom, where Blanche lay on the bed, dressed, but too ill to sit up, when the Roundheads succeeded in getting into the castle.

[1] *Annals of Chepstow Castle.*

CHAPTER XXII

GWEN DIES FOR HER MISTRESS

'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'—John xv. 13.

'WHAT is that noise, Gwen?' Blanche asked, feebly, when the sound of a slight commotion in the next room aroused her attention.

Gwen made some evasive answer, and stooped to give her mistress a drink of cold water.

'How pale you look, Gwen!' Blanche murmured. 'Methinks you too should be resting. Child, you are not fit to wait upon me.'

'Oh yes, I am. Do let me! It is the greatest pleasure——' Gwen broke off in alarm, for she distinctly heard a noise like the clashing of steel in the outer room.

'That noise again,' Blanche's lips murmured. 'How it goes through my poor head!' She closed her eyes as she spoke, and the next minute, being thoroughly exhausted, fell asleep.

'Hullo! Where are you?' called a loud and most disagreeable voice in the next room. Gwen stepped into it with her finger on her lips, to

betoken the need of silence. She shut the bedroom door carefully behind her.

Hugh Reese stood in the middle of the room, sword in hand, and looking wild and distraught.

'Where is she? Where is her Mightiness Mistress Blanche Mansell?' he demanded, scoffingly.

'Not here! Not here, sir!' cried Gwen, feeling horribly afraid of him.

'Not here? A likely tale! How am I to believe that? I have come here to find her and to kill her, you know; so she must be here! I will tell you, girl, how it is.' His voice became lower and more cunning. 'I have ruined my life for her! For long I have had no other end in view than to win her for my bride. Do you know I betrayed this castle for her sake—left my side, and came over to the Royalists. And a wretched hash I made of it! They treated me worse than a dog—shut me up in a dungeon, and only let me out to make me fight like a common soldier. Do you hear that? Do you?' he demanded.

'Yes, yes!' faltered Gwen, all her courage failing her before his fury.

'And what have I got for it?' he continued, violently. 'What have I gained? Nothing! Nothing whatever! My lady flouts her humble servant, hates him, abhors him! She counts as nothing, or worse than nothing, the love he has had for her—the love that ruined him. However'—his

'NOT HERE! NOT HERE, SIR!' CRIED GWEN, FEELING HORRIBLY AFRAID OF HIM.

tones changed to those of triumph—'there is a remedy. She would never be my bride. Therefore she shall die! When she is dead—killed by my hand—I shall be revenged! Yes, I shall be revenged. Vengeance is good. When a man can get naught else, then comes revenge!' His face was contorted with evil passions.

Gwen caught hold of a chair-back. She could not speak.

'Don't you agree with me?' he asked. 'Come, speak your mind. Tell me if you do.'

'I don't agree with you. It is horrible! Horrible!' she gasped.

'You think so, but you are only a maid—a serving-maid! How should you know? Revenge is sweet. I will be revenged. I will kill her!'

'You dare not do it!' Gwen cried, frantically. 'Men will kill you if you touch but a hair of her head. Sir Nicholas, the Lion of Glamorgan, will hang you upon his gallows at Cefn Mably.'

'What matters that? She will be dead. I shall have killed her,' he muttered, savagely.

Gwen perceived that he had lost all control over himself. It was terrible to see him given up to rage.

'What care I about my own life?' he went on, speaking with violence. 'Look ye! I shall be killed in any case. Are the Roundheads likely to forget who opened the Western Gate for the

Royalists? No, no. They will hang me like a dog. I would rather die by my own hand after I have killed Blanche, who would not marry me, so it serves her right!' he rambled on, quite beside himself.

'No, no! You must not do it! You shall not!' cried poor Gwen, turning despairing eyes to the door for the help which did not come. 'Don't do it!'

As well might she have asked the river to cease flowing as it swept by Chepstow's hold, or the wind to cease blowing round its dismantled towers.

'Go and fetch Blanche Mansell—my bride that was to be. Bring her here. Go, quickly!' commanded Reese.

'I will not!' Gwen shrank back, with wide eyes full of horror. What could she do? How could she save her mistress?'

'If you don't fetch her,' muttered Reese, 'I shall go myself.' He took his sword out of its scabbard, and began to feel its edge.

'Wait till I fetch her,' said Gwen, suddenly. 'You stay here, Master Reese, to receive her when she comes out of her room.'

'Ha, ha!' he laughed, wildly. 'I will guard the door. When she comes through I will receive her thus!' He swung his sword, as if cleaving the air.

Gwen ran into the inner room, shutting the door

after her, and locking it—but the lock was such an old feeble one that a child could have forced it. Gwen knew it would be no defence against a madman such as Reese had now become.

Blanche, ill and worn out, had fallen asleep upon the bed. One thin arm was on the coverlet; her dark hair fell over the white pillow, her whole appearance was so frail, so delicate and yet so sweet that the maid, who loved her dearly, yearned to gather her in faithful arms and shield her from all danger. A great heart had Gwen, and wonderful courage. Though she had lost some of it for a brief space of time, it had all returned to her now. She knew no fear.

As she looked at her mistress, loath to awake her to so great a danger, Blanche's pale lips trembled, and she said in her sleep, in sweet, happy tones, 'We will always keep Gwen with us, Charles dear. 'Twould break my heart to part with her—she is such a good, true friend as well as servant—I love her dearly—I cannot tell you all she has been to me, nor how I love her.' And then again, after a brief pause, 'Gwen is so faithful—faithful and true. I could trust her with my life.'

Gwen stooped and kissed her mistress's hand lightly, so as not to awake her. Then she ran back to the door, and examined it again. It was of thick old oak, strong enough in itself, but its fastenings were wofully weak.

Was there anything she could place against it to make a barrier? Nothing large enough or heavy enough. The bed was a fixture, and could not be moved, its curtains reached from the ceiling—a fashion of that day. She heard the man in the next room moving about; his sword clicked against something. He growled bad words.

An idea flashed across her desperate mind. If Reese must kill some one, it need not be her mistress.

'He shall not kill her. I will die for her!' Gwen said to herself. 'I have often personated a boy or a young man for less reason. I will now pretend to be my mistress. Reese will then kill me, and probably himself afterwards, and my dear lady will go free.'

'Wench!' called Hugh Reese from the other room, 'on your peril attend to my words. Send your mistress through the door first. Do you hear me?'

'Yes, yes,' answered Gwen, softly, fearing lest Blanche should hear and awake.

The maid was hastily putting on some of her mistress's outdoor clothing as she spoke, and pushing her own sunny locks out of sight under the great bonnet which hid them completely.

The sleeper stirred restlessly. She was still dreaming of her arrangements for the future, when she should be the wife of Sir Charles Kemeys.

And mingled with them all the time were thoughts of Gwen. 'Dear Gwen!' she said again; 'faithful and true. Charles dear, I love her.'

Pleasant words to be the last Gwen would ever hear from those loved lips, or indeed from any one!

She gave her mistress a glance full of the tenderest love, and ran out of the room, shutting the door behind her.

The next moment she received a fatal blow.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DEATH OF A HERO

'I looked upon his brow—no sign
  Of guilt or fear was there;
He stood as proud by that death shrine
  As even o'er despair
He had a power in his eye;
There was a quenchless energy,
  A spirit that could dare
The deadliest form that death could take,
And dare it for the daring's sake.'

LANDON.

IN Sir Nicholas's room a fierce conflict had been raging around the old hero, during which he received a deadly wound.

Now he lay on the floor dying, his son Charles supporting his head, and listening to the last words falling from the rapidly whitening lips.

''Twas for the King,' said the dying 'Lion of Glamorgan.' ''Twas for the King. Tell him——' He broke down, and there was a long pause, as he struggled for breath.

They moistened his lips—it was a Roundhead knight who lent his flask of brandy—Roundheads as well as Royalists were weeping, though they

turned away their heads to hide it—and by degrees Sir Nicholas was able to falter, 'Tell him we waited,' a pause—then he continued, with an effort, 'waited for succour——;' breaking down again, he gave up the attempt to finish that sentence.

The Parliamentarians and Royalists stood around listening, awed by the majesty of death, and for the moment forgetting their feud, they hung upon the dying words of the great hero. For a little time it seemed as if they waited in vain, and that he might never speak again.

But no, suddenly he roused himself to say distinctly in a shrill whisper, 'The King can do no wrong,' and then more gently the motto of his house, 'God, and His grace.'

It seemed as if those would be the last words he would utter, and indeed, although he spoke again, it was only in delirium.

'Is it you, Wild Bird?' he said, looking at Charles, who was supporting him.

'Dear father,' said Sir Charles, not liking to disturb his fancy, and the tears rolled down the young knight's face, as he supported him.

'My own little Wild Bird,' said the dying man, with infinite tenderness, 'did you fly here to my help? 'Twas like you, dear one. Chains could not keep you, nor bars, away from those you love.' He smiled rapturously. 'To do our duty, remember it, Wild Bird, to do—our duty——;' he gasped

for breath, and then continued, 'when 'tis hard and unpleasant—for God and the King.' His voice sunk low: but with immense effort he began again, slowly and with great distinctness, 'Good-bye, Wild Bird. Dearest and best of all!' He lay still for several minutes, then, opening his eyes, smiled upon those present, folded his hands, and said in clear, triumphant tones, 'Thanks be to God, Who giveth victory!' and thus he passed away, unconscious of defeat.

For a few minutes there was silence in the room while all present with bared heads looked down on the dead hero: then, slowly, and almost with reluctance, the Roundheads commenced their work, and falling upon the Royalists present, proceeded to bind them hand and foot. Only Sir Charles they touched not, for a stout officer of their own side had drawn him swiftly on one side.

''Tis you again,' Rowland Rowlands said in the young knight's ear. 'Ay, marry! But you are in a dangerous case once more. Where is young Mistress Mansell?'

'God help her!' cried Sir Charles, realising all at once her great danger. 'Rowlands, come with me.' He was about to rush down-stairs when the Parliamentarian stopped him.

'Take heed what you are doing,' Rowlands said in his ear. 'The whole place is in our hands, and you won't be allowed to go half-a-dozen steps unless

you are disguised. Here, take this doublet!' and pulling off his own as he spoke, he assisted Sir Charles to put it on. Then he thrust his own hat on the young knight's head, shoving his long fair hair under it until all was concealed. 'Now come with me,' he whispered.

As they passed down-stairs Rowlands called aloud to a soldier in the court below to bring him a Roundhead's hat and doublet, pretending he had lost his in the fray. The hat and doublet were therefore brought to him which had been taken from a dead Roundhead slain in the assault.

Having put them on, Rowlands suffered Charles to lead the way to Blanche Mansell's rooms.

As they entered the lady's sitting-room they perceived two dead bodies lying on the floor. One was a young girl, at the sight of whom Sir Charles turned faint, for she was wearing Blanche's clothes, though a second glance showed him she was not his beloved, but only her maid; the other was Hugh Reese, with his sword beside him on the floor.

Hurrying past into the inner room, they found Blanche Mansell lying upon her bed, looking so white and colourless that at first sight they thought she, too, was dead. However, she had only swooned, whether from hunger, or because of having heard what had been passing in the other room they did not know.

'Stay; do not attempt to arouse her too

abruptly,' said Rowlands. 'Rather, do you remain and guard her here, while I go and speak to Colonel Ewer. He warreth not with maidens. He will let her go, nay more, I will get him to allow me to conduct her to her home. You must take care of her, Sir Charles, till I return,' and so saying he left the room.

* * * * * *

Thus it came about that when Blanche opened her eyes she looked straight into the face of her own dear knight, who was endeavouring to induce her to swallow some spirit from a flask that had been brought to him.

'Drink it, my precious one,' he said, in such a tone of entreaty that Blanche could not help obeying him.

Feeling better, she sat up, and for some moments they delighted in each other's presence, and had need of few words in which to speak their satisfaction.

After their first rapturous happiness Blanche's memory revived, and she said, 'How goes the siege? Are they not needing you on the walls, my dear knight?'

'They want me there no more,' Sir Charles returned, in vain endeavouring to speak cheerfully.

'Why? What has happened? Tell me—tell me all!' implored the startled girl.

'Can you bear to hear it, dearest? Can you bear

to hear that we are conquered?' Sir Charles sighed deeply as he spoke.

'Yes, if we have been conquered in fair fight.'

Sir Charles bent his head. 'We could not help it,' he said.

'You have all fought valiantly,' the girl rejoined. 'There is no shame in a defeat due to superior numbers and circumstances quite beyond your control. But your father, Charles,' she added, thoughtfully, 'this will be hard upon him. It will break his heart.'

'He will never sorrow any more, Blanche. He has gone where there is no more pain, nor disappointment, nor grief.'

'Charles!' Blanche cried, with deep emotion. 'Oh, Charles! Dear Sir Nicholas!'

'He died a hero's death!'

Blanche burst into tears. Dearly, dearly had she loved the gallant knight, who had received her so affectionately into his household, and was so gladly prepared to welcome her as a daughter.

Sir Charles comforted her as well as he was able, hearing all the time the sounds men were making in clearing the other room of the dead, and dreading that Blanche should ask after her maid.

Too soon the question came. 'And Gwen? Where is she? It is strange she is not here! Have you seen anything of her, Charles?'

Sir Charles hesitated; his looks and his hesitation betrayed his trouble, and Blanche, seizing his hands with both hers, cried out, imperiously, 'Tell me the worst, is Gwen dead also?'

'Gwen said once that she would defend you if necessary with her life. She has done it, dearest.'

'What? Has she given her life for me? Has she? Oh, Charles, who could be brutal enough to take that faithful life?'

'Does it matter who took it?' Sir Charles said, wearily, seeking to change the subject.

But Blanche cried, 'Was it my enemy? Was it Hugh Reese? Ah! I see it was! He came here to kill me and Gwen defended me with her life. Now, God pardon me! I can never forgive that wretch!'

'He has gone to a Higher Tribunal. The man is dead—killed by his own hand, I believe!'

'And Gwen, dear Gwen! She laid down her life for me?'

'Yes, yes. 'Twas like her.'

'It was indeed!' And now Blanche's tears were raining down upon the hands with which she covered her face.

Rowland Rowlands looked in twice before he could summon up enough courage to enter. Then, when at last he did so, he said, quickly, 'Sir Charles, Mistress Mansell must come with me at once. I have obtained leave to escort her, with a

small body of men, to Cefn Mably. But it must be done immediately.'

'You will come too, Charles?' Blanche said, tentatively.

'No, Mistress Mansell, I cannot get permission for him to go away yet. Colonel Ewer only permits you to go,' said Rowland Rowlands.

'But I will not go without you, Charles!' Blanche cried, clinging to him. 'You said you would never leave me again.'

'Never, if I could help it, sweetheart. But a prisoner——'

'Surely you are not a prisoner?'

'Something like it, my own.'

'Yet you are with me?'

'Through this gentleman's kindness,' said Sir Charles, looking gratefully at Rowland Rowlands.

'I cannot thank you, sir,' said Blanche, looking up at the Roundhead pitifully through her tears. 'My heart is so full of pain. You see, sir,' she continued, 'I loved Sir Nicholas, and he has gone. And I loved Gwen—my faithful maid—I loved her dearly, and she has gone. And dearest of all is my sweetheart, I cannot let him go! I cannot go away without him! I cannot! Dear sir, you are pitiful and kind, I pray you prevail on the others to let my Charles remain with me!'

'Dear mistress,' Rowland Rowlands cried, 'I would if I could; but Colonel Ewer concedes much

in allowing me to conduct you to your home. He would not part with Sir Charles until such time as should seem to him good, even if I were to pray him on my knees. But I beg you come with me instantly; there is no time to be lost.'

'Yes, go. Go, sweetheart, with this friend, this kind friend,' Sir Charles implored.

But Blanche cried, passionately, 'I cannot leave you! I will not! My guardian they have slain, my maid is killed, and they shall not have you also! I will kneel——;' she broke off, weeping, and began again, 'I will kneel at Colonel Ewer's feet, and beg him to spare your life—and if—if he is such a monster as not to yield to my entreaties, I will cling to you so closely that if they kill you they must kill me also; I——'

'Stay, sweetheart!' exclaimed Sir Charles. 'Listen to me. Things will not come to such a pass. Colonel Ewer is a gentleman, just and upright. He will not require my life, though he may demand my promise not to fight again against the Parliament——'

'And will you give it to him, Charles?' asked Blanche, with a keen look at his resolute young face.

'I shall do as I think right,' he answered, evasively.

'You will not forget your battle cry, "For God and the King," I know,' the girl exclaimed, despairingly.

'Would you have me forget it, Blanche? Would you have me be a poltroon, a coward, a turncoat?'

'No, no! But——'

'I am a Kemeys!' Sir Charles said, solemnly. 'And a son of the Lion of Glamorgan.'

'The dead Lion!' said Blanche, in desolate tones.

'Who being dead yet liveth,' corrected Charles. 'Blanche,' he added quickly, 'you must go with Lieutenant Rowlands. Sweetheart, I command you to go.'

'Yes. Come this instant,' cried Rowland Rowlands. 'Colonel Ewer will be angry if I neglect to obey his order to take you away instantly.'

Blanche threw herself into Charles's arms, and, kissing her white brow, he handed her over to the lieutenant, who almost carried her from the room as a crowd of military men pressed into it.

CHAPTER XXIV

CECILY HEARS THE NEWS

'What is death
To him who meets it with an upright heart?
A quiet haven where his shattered bark
Harbours secure, till the rough storm is past.
Perhaps a passage overhung with clouds,
But at its entrance, a few leagues beyond
Opening to kinder skies and milder suns,
And seas pacific as the soul that seeks them.'

HURDIS.

IT was a dull day, and Cecily, feeling downcast and ill at ease, went out to walk under the trees in the wood near Cefn Mably. No news had come from Chepstow for a day or two, and she feared that if the garrison was still holding out, provisions would be running short, and starvation might be threatening her dear ones—the lion-hearted father, the friend who was to be a sister and whom she dearly loved, and Gwen, the blue-eyed maiden, her *protegée* of old, and later her beloved follower and servant.

It seemed only the other day that she was a child riding bareback through that wood with Gwen, a wild, unkempt, barefooted lassie, walking

by her side, declaring, 'People talk about the King, and about Cromwell and the Parliament, and the dangers and troubles of the times, but poor Gwen thinks only of her Mistress Cecily and Sir Nicholas and Lady Jane and the young gentlemen and young ladies of the house. They are what she cares for most, and for them—to save them if they were in trouble, she would die.'

'Ah, so you would, Gwen!' said Cecily, half aloud. 'You faithful creature! True as steel you are, and brave as brave you can be! Ha! What is that?'

An attenuated figure approached, leaning on a stout old stick. It was John Jones, Gwen's grandfather.

'Well, Mr. Jones,' said Cecily, in her pleasant way, as he stood still before her, 'do you want me?'

'Indeed it is my old woman who is wanting you, mistress,' the old man replied. 'She is very bad—very bad indeed, and all her cry is for Mistress Cecily.'

'I will come to her presently, Mr. Jones.'

'Come now, mistress. Come now. She is weeping and weeping, and I cannot comfort her.'

'Why, what is the matter?'

'She has had bad dreams of Sir Nicholas and our Gwen, and she sees signs and hears things which betoken death.'

'She is very superstitious, I fear,' Cecily said, gently, as she prepared to accompany the old man towards his home.

'You will see that she is right, mistress,' he returned, with an air of great solemnity.

When Cecily approached the cottage she could hear loud weeping and wailing from others as well as the old woman, and upon entering she found that old Jane Jones's village friends had gathered around her, and after hearing all she had to tell them, they were uniting in loud expressions of most extravagant distress. Upon the entrance of the young lady from Cefn Mably, however, the sobbing and wailing ceased, and for a time at least silence prevailed.

The air inside the room was very bad, and Cecily, coming in out of the sweet, fresh atmosphere outside, recoiled for a moment, then, waving her hand toward the door, she said, 'Will every one go out, please, except Mrs. and Mr. Jones?'

'But we are assisting her to bear it—we are keeping her company in her woe,' protested a stout dame.

'I will assist her. I will keep her company,' Cecily returned, adding, in commanding tones, 'Go. Go.'

They all went out then, and the young visitor was left alone with the old woman.

'I have come, Mrs. Jones,' said the girl, bending

over the bed, and speaking in clear, well-pronounced Welsh. 'I am Cecily Kemeys, you know, and I am here.'

The old creature uncovered her face, and peered up through the gloom of the ill-lighted room—there was only one small window in it—to look into the young lady's face.

'Mistress Kemeys,' she murmured in Welsh, 'your lion-hearted father, who was always good to poor Jane Jones, is dead, and so is my poor little Gwen—my poor little Gwen!' she repeated, with sobs and tears.

'Oh, but no!' cried Cecily. 'Indeed you must be mistaken. God would not let them be taken from us! He would not! He would not!' she repeated, vehemently.

'I saw them in a vision last night,' persisted the old woman. 'They were entering a shining gate. My little Gwen was going in first, and Sir Nicholas was following. It was not seemly, to my thinking, that he should follow, and I cried out sharply, 'Gwen, Gwen, mend your manners! Sir Nicholas must enter first!' But she went straight on, and then I saw a hand beckoning to her, and Sir Nicholas turned and smiled. Then I saw the hand beckon to him, and he went in, and the door was shut, and I was outside, beating upon it and crying, "Let me come in!"' She sank back into the bed, gasping for breath.

Cecily went to the window, and with difficulty forced it open. As the cool air swept into the little close room something which Cecily could not discern passed out.

When she turned back to the bed, it was to see a white, immovable face, with dark eyes staring out of their sunken sockets, while the lines of the little old figure outlined on the bed were stark and stiff.

'Mrs. Jones!' called Cecily. 'Mrs. Jones!' But no one answered. The silence in the room was unnerving.

Old Mrs. Jones was dead.

* * * * * *

Later on, as Cecily was returning home, she met a man-servant with woful looks coming in search of her.

'Mistress Cecily, you are wanted at home,' he said. 'Lady Jane bade me seek you. News has come from Chepstow—sad news about Sir Nicholas. And Mistress Blanche has returned, brought home by a Roundhead gentleman and half dead with fatigue and illness; but she cannot rest, she cannot sleep, she says, until she has seen you.'

'I will hasten to her. But tell me—tell me the news about my father!' cried Cecily, fearing the worst.

The man glanced at her, and then answered,

sorrowfully, 'When I came away they were putting the Cefn Mably flag half-mast high.'

'Then he is dead!' cried Cecily, in lamentable tones. 'Oh, my father! My father! Would that I could have died for you, my father!'

The man could give her no particulars about the death of Sir Nicholas; he only knew that it had occurred. In order to learn more, as well as to see Blanche, Cecily hastened home.

Blanche lay on the big bed in the guest-chamber, wan and colourless, with big, pathetic eyes that could shed no more tears for the time being.

'Cecily! Oh, Cecily!' she cried, as Charles's favourite sister took her into her arms.

'Poor Blanche! Poor dear Blanche! What you have been through!'

The others who were in the room stole out, leaving the two girls together.

'I could not sleep until you came,' said Blanche. 'I felt that when he had gone I wanted Sir Nicholas's Wild Bird.'

'Don't!' sobbed Cecily. 'I can't bear it! He was the best—the noblest! But tell me all. Did he die defeated? Was the siege raised?'

Blanche told her all she knew in low, thrilling tones—Sir Nicholas's valour—the long wait for the King's succour which never came—the cruel starvation when provisions fell short—the bitter disappointment of the men when they discovered

that the boat by which they might have escaped had been taken away—the breach in the wall, the inrush of Roundheads—and Sir Charles's coming to her with the news of his father's death. At that point she stopped short.

'What about Gwen?' cried Cecily. 'Where is she? Why have you not brought her home?'

Sorrowfully Blanche told of Gwen's heroic death, for, although she knew no details, it was evident to her, as it was to Sir Charles, that the faithful maid had died to save her.

Then Cecily exclaimed, 'Oh, why was it not I? All my life I have longed to be a heroine, and do great deeds. I should have loved to die for you, Blanche dearest. But I was left aside, to eat out my heart in uselessness, while Gwen, poor Gwen, was chosen to do a supreme deed of heroism. I envy her. To die like that was victory! Oh, happy, happy Gwen! We will record her heroism on a monument or tablet. The tale of it shall be told to our children's children. Don't weep for Gwen, Blanche dearest! She is far, far beyond us in blessedness.

'Yes,' Blanche returned, 'we must think of her as distinguished on earth by the truest heroism, and crowned in Heaven with the victor's crown, because, like our dear Lord and Master, she loved so well that she gave up her life to save the object of her love.'

'It does so comfort me to hear that, dear Blanche. Methinks I have never heard you speak more wisely,' said Cecily, adding, 'Who has been teaching you?'

'I think God has taught me through all the troubles I have had, and in that awful time when I met death face to face in the siege of Chepstow, and wrestled with the mystery of life and death whilst watching over the dying. I seemed to see then more plainly than ever before that a long life is not to be so much desired as a faithful life, and that when one has humbly sought to follow our Master and trusts in His merits for pardon, one is ready for death.'

'To die for another, what could be higher or more Christ-like? Gwen did it, and my father also, for he died for his King!' Cecily said, with shining eyes.

'Then we must not weep for him,' Blanche said, albeit she suppressed a sob, 'for sure I am that he has won a victor's crown.'

CHAPTER XXV

THE ESCAPE OF SIR CHARLES

'Greatness lies not in being strong, but in the right using of strength; and strength is not used rightly when it only serves to carry a man above his fellows for his own solitary glory. He is greatest whose strength carries up the most hearts by the attraction of his own.'—H. W. B.

'YOU here, Charles! Oh, how charming! Have they forgiven you?'

'I am afraid not, Blanche. At this moment they are probably extremely enraged with me for escaping.'

'Then it was a case of escaping?' Blanche said, tentatively, looking into his dear face with the keen eyes of love, and observing with concern how thin and careworn it had become.

She had been walking up and down a garden path, thinking about him in the gloaming, and longing to hear how he was getting on, when suddenly he appeared, crossing over from a path through the grounds which led from the park, and looking dusty, and, oddly enough, dressed like a Roundhead, while his hair was more untidy and untrimmed than she had ever seen it. His whole

appearance was that of one who had been through a struggle physically as well as mentally.

'Yes, dearest, I was a prisoner,' he said, 'and not on parole, and so, if I were ever to be free, it had to be a case of escaping.'

Blanche took his hand in hers and looked down on it with concern. It was roughened and scarred and bore the marks of scratches.

'Poor Charles!' she said, sympathisingly, 'I am afraid you have been through a hard time. But,' she added, more cheerfully, with a smile which was positively radiant, 'you have escaped, and that is the main point.'

'Yes, thank God, I have!' the knight replied, with emotion. 'You know, my dearest,' he continued, 'I could not stay away from you any longer. Every day and every hour I found myself wanting you more and more; and then there was another thing, they were constantly tempting me to obtain my freedom in the wrong way;' he paused, wiping his brow, on which stood drops of moisture.

'How do you mean?' asked Blanche. 'Please explain.'

'Well, sweetheart, you must know, they promised that I should have my freedom at once, if I would take an oath never again to bear arms against Cromwell and the Parliament. In other words, I was to pledge myself never to fight again

for my King. Just fancy! A Kemeys could not promise that, you know. He simply could not.'

'Of course you could not.'

'And the alternative being perpetual imprisonment,' continued Sir Charles, 'there was nothing for it but to make a dash for freedom.'

'Sit down, dearest,' said Blanche, leading him to a pretty rustic seat behind some shrubs, 'and tell me all about it.'

They sat down, and Sir Charles told his tale modestly and as behoved a gallant soldier.

'I was confined in a small room in one of the towers,' he said, 'and I ate my heart out in hungry longing for the world outside in general, and one spot in particular——'

'Which was that, sweetheart?' struck in Blanche.

'Where you are, my darling,' he replied. 'I was dreadfully anxious about you, thinking of all the trouble you had been through, and the way in which your health was undermined during the privations of the siege. That good fellow Rowland Rowlands contrived to let me know that you had reached home in safety; otherwise I should have worried about that, too. As it was I had sufficient care upon my mind, I can assure you. What with thinking about my King, who I feared was losing on all sides, and my mother in the first anguish of her bereavement, and dear Cecily,

father's Wild Bird, who had not even the sorry comfort of knowing that she was in his mind to the last, and that his last words were all of her and to her—the last message from his lips was one for her. All these things I grieved over by day and night; and of course the knowledge that the castle was in the hands of Roundheads, while I was a poor prisoner, whose sword had been taken from him, was ever with me—a hideous load of trouble.'

'Poor Charles! I was thinking of all that, here in your dear home, and I prayed God to comfort you and set you free,' said Blanche, with infinite tenderness.

He pressed her hand, whispering, 'I knew it. In my better moments I felt that your prayers would bring me help from on High. Well,' he continued, in a louder tone, 'what with sorrow, the close confinement, the want of air and good food, and one thing and another, I fell into a state of despondency which positively frightened me, and I was convinced that if it continued I should no longer be able to make a bid for freedom by the strength of my arm and the fleetness of my feet. Then I grew desperate. "Now or never," I said to myself, one day, when my warder brought in my prison fare of stale bread and cold water.

'It was all done in a few moments, when once I had made up my mind to do it. The jailer lay upon the floor, stunned by one blow of my fist.

To pull off his clothes and dress myself in them was easily accomplished—mine I flung over the poor beggar—to seize his keys and unlock the prison doors and escape out of it was done almost as soon as thought of, and by imitating his walk and manner I succeeded in passing the other warders and some of the castle servants, without attracting observation or incurring suspicion.

'As soon as I was outside in the street everything was easy, especially as I came across a good friend in the person of a Cornishman, a travelling wrestler, who goes about the kingdom wrestling with the champion wrestlers of each county. He happened to be struck with my height and breadth and bearing, which last was wholly unlike that of any man in the position indicated by my clothes. He seemed mightily taken with me, and would not give me any peace until I consented to wrestle with him. I happened to win, and then a curious thing occurred; he declared that I was exactly like Sir Nicholas Kemeys, with whom he had once been privileged to wrestle, and he praised my father's prowess and mighty skill, and the way in which he beat him——'

'I know all about his wrestling with your father,' Blanche struck in, 'for dear Cecily once told me about it.'

'Indeed. What did she say?'

'Oh, that Gwen saw your father and a Cornish-

man wrestling near the grand entrance to the park from the village of Maes-y-bryn, and Gwen helped on the *dénouement* by calling out that the Cornishman would kill Sir Nicholas, which so startled the former that he allowed himself to be surprised the next moment and utterly overcome.'

'Ah, yes, the Cornishman told me he was startled at the critical moment by a woman's scream, and that my father at once seized the opportunity to complete his work. The man was touched with my father's generosity, too, for father gave him his purse, by way of solace for his wounded feelings.'

'That was exactly like your father,' cried Blanche, 'a more generous man never existed.'

'It was fortunate for me; as the Cornishman, on finding I was indeed a Kemeys and the son of Sir Nicholas, warmly espoused my cause, and lost no time in telling every one we met—for he made me travel with him the moment he heard of the risk I ran—that I was his friend and brother, who had been acting for a time as warden to the many prisoners now confined in Chepstow Castle. And all that greatly assisted me to make my way here.'

'I should like to thank that man,' Blanche cried, with enthusiasm. 'What became of him, dearest?'

'We parted outside the park by the grand entrance from Maes-y-bryn, after he had shown me the exact spot where he and my father wrestled.

He was going to travel to Montgomeryshire, he said, as he had heard of a famous wrestler there with whom he meant to try his skill.'

At that moment Cecily appeared, coming down the garden path, and calling, gently—Cecily had grown very gentle of late—'Blanche! Blanche, dearest, where have you hidden yourself? Oh, whom have you there? Why, Charles!' And with a cry of delight upon perceiving Sir Charles, she ran up to him.

Blanche slipped away and left them together for a little while, in order that her dear knight might tell his sister all about her father's dying words, and how he called to her and talked of her more than any one else in his last moments, though so many loved him.

CHAPTER XXVI

CONCLUSION

THE SIEGE OF CEFN MABLY

'Civil wars leave nothing but tombs.'—LEMARTIN.

'The veteran warrior is never in haste to strike the blow: he surveys his foe, watches his opportunity, and cautiously reins in the fury of his rage: he changes place upon the field, advances, stops till the moment comes when he can give the sure blow.'—METASTASIO.

'A great country ought never to have little wars.'—
WELLINGTON.

IT was a hot June day. The great mansion of Cefn Mably was crowded with officers and soldiers, including many of the Glamorganshire gentlemen and the hardy mountaineers Sir Nicholas Kemeys had spent so much time in disciplining and training. The blazoned banner of King Charles waved high above the roof. Outside, on the green lawns and all about the surrounding grounds, companies of pikemen and musketeers were marshalled.

The time was come for which Sir Nicholas had so long prepared—alas, that he was no longer there to see it—Cefn Mably was besieged.

The Parliamentary forces which had done so

well at Chepstow were following up their victory in other parts of South Wales.

Missing Sir Charles Kemeys amongst the prisoners in Chepstow Castle, they had followed him to his home, and were now encamped on St. Melan's Hill, with cannon and troops of musketeers and pikemen, whilst high above their heads floated the standard, 'For God and the King.'

From their position the Puritan commanders had a good sight of Cefn Mably on its hill-side. As they looked at the beautiful old Hall they planned soon to leave it a heap of ruins. But that was easier said than done.

'With the sword of the Lord and of Gideon!' was their battle-cry, as they first stormed Maes-y-bryn, blowing up the gate and pillars of it, and passing through a village so silent that they imagined Sir Charles Kemeys must have fled with all his people. Their courage rose as they went on, seeing no one amongst all the deserted buildings. Their officers began to boast that they would soon enjoy 'the wine of the cursed Amalekite' and the 'rich spoil of the Philistine,' and declared 'The Saints shall smite the Malignants, as Barak did when Sisera fled away.' There were no limits to their boastings. And all the while they steadily advanced with their great company, until from amongst the trees they emerged suddenly in full view of Cefn Mably.

Then they perceived what had, owing to distance, been hidden from their view, entrenchments great and deep, backed by rows upon rows of armed men. As they looked the blast of trumpets cleft the air, and they saw the standard of the Kemeys' race, with its motto, 'God, and His grace,' floating above the men in the faint breeze.

They could not hear the manly words in which Sir Charles was addressing his soldiers. 'Remember my father's death,' he cried. 'Avenge the murder of Sir Nicholas Kemeys. 'Twas a base deed, and foully done, to kill him after he had won Chepstow! But he died for his King! My brave comrades, the enemy has come here against us now: and he has ten to one. Yet we will fight these canting Puritans, and either win the victory or die like men. We could not attempt to hold Maes-y-bryn, being so far outnumbered; but let us now fight like brave Welshmen, and may God maintain the right!'

The Puritan commander, on the other hand, was saying to his men, 'Soldiers of Naseby, remember Marston Moor, and fear not.'

The Roundheads dashed forward through a tangled, woody copse, encountering a withering fire from the Royalists. Once through the bewildering bushes, however—where many a grey-haired veteran was left behind—they fired back so effectively as to make deadly havoc.

The Cavaliers fought bravely, although pressed

on every side. 'For God and the King!' was their battle-cry, and with those words upon his lips many a man dropped dead. The defenders tottered at last, which the other side were quick to note; their pikemen hurried onward through the green.

The Royalists were in a desperate case, but at that moment, to their great joy, a trumpet blast was heard from the west.

'They come! They come at last!' cried Sir Charles's soldiers.

And very soon round the trenches swept a regiment of cuirassiers, coming to their aid.

'Remember Chepstow!' shouted Sir Charles. 'Ho! trumpets, sound the Gallop-charge!'

Immediately the newly arrived cuirassiers rode forward, with 'lightning speed,'[1] right through the Roundhead ranks and back again, their broadswords hewing down men on every side, making a bloody way.

Completely cut up by this onslaught, the Roundhead leaders hastily led a retreat, which was followed for several miles by the excited Royalists, indeed, almost close up to Cardiff's towers.

* * * * * *

'Blanche, my darling, listen. You must not weep now. 'Tis the hour of victory.'

'Yes, Charles, yes. But—but——' and the girl's tears flowed fast.

[1] *The Siege of Cefn Mably.*

'Sweetest, you must not weep now,' repeated Sir Charles, earnestly. Like a true man, he hated to see a woman in tears, most of all the woman whom he loved.

'If only your father and mine, and dear, dear Gwen were here to rejoice with us!' sobbed Blanche.

'Dearest, perhaps they do rejoice with us. Who knows?' And Sir Charles looked out upon the moonlit scene, thinking of the great mystery of death. It had been very near him several times that day, yet he was spared to return to Blanche, his beloved.

There were great rejoicings below stairs. Singing in the chapel, singing in the great hall, and even singing in the long stone gallery, wherein soldiers were quartered—so that it ever afterwards was called 'The Soldiers' Gallery.' And all the singing was songs of praise and thanksgiving to God, Who had given them the victory. But Sir Charles, having returned among the last of those who chased the Puritan leaders to Cardiff, missed Blanche amongst the singers, and went up-stairs to seek her, finding her, at length, in that topmost room where she had often sat with Gwen watching for his coming and for news of him whilst he was absent at the wars. Her eyes were wet with tears.

'But I thank God you are safe, dear Charles!'

she cried. 'He has been very good to us in sparing you.'

'Do you care so much, dear love?'

'Yes, yes. You know I should have been heart-broken if you had been killed!'

'Therefore the good Lord spared me, dearest.'

'Yes, I have been thanking Him up here, dear Charles. He knows I love Him for it.'

They watched the peaceful night scene for a little while. No distant camp fires were *en evidence* now. No silent, or it might be noisy besiegers kept watch around, boasting of what they would do with Cefn Mably. Only the big trees, Nature's sentinels, stood there alone; and the lake shone in the moonlight like burnished silver, whilst owls hooted in the wood hard by, and a corncrake in the park uttered its queer, cracked notes; and then, to crown all, a nightingale on a near tree let fall a flood of melody.

Blanche and Sir Charles listened in silence to the familiar sounds a little while, then the latter said, 'They will want me below. But before I go I have something to tell you, sweet one.'

'What is it, dear love? And why do you fear to tell me?' she asked, observing the reluctance with which he spoke.

''Tis only more ill news,' he answered, gently. 'Our dear, good friend Rowland Rowlands was amongst the slain.'

'That grieves me inexpressibly,' said Blanche, tears again filling her eyes. 'Tell me how it was.'

'He was amongst those we pursued, although I did not know it until too late. They seemed to be escaping, and one of our men fired. A man instantly fell from his horse. When we reached him I perceived it was our friend. The others rode on, but I, dismounting, knelt beside him and raised him up. The bullet had done deadly work. He was dying.'

'Did he know you, Charles? Did he speak?'

'Yes, yes. I gave him brandy, begging him to try to live. "What? Is it you?" he began, in his cheery way. But he was unable to say more just then. I endeavoured to cheer him up. I said all the kindest words I could. I told him how we felt towards him for all his goodness to us. At length he spoke very feebly again. "They made me come to fight," he said, "but I think—I think I've done no harm." Then he lay silent a little while. When his lips moved once more I could scarcely hear what he said, but I believe it was, "I thank God I have not slain one man!" Then he sank into a state of insensibility, and died. Just as I was wondering what to do with the body, old Evan Evans came up—you remember he is a worthy storekeeper at Maes-y-bryn.'

'Yes, yes,' she answered. 'I know him well.'

'It seems Master Rowlands had been a benefactor to poor old Evans, time after time paying his debts, when he would have been sent to prison for them, and such like. The old man said he would take the body to his own house, that it might be buried decently. He was terribly cut up, and lamented because that was all he could do. I promised if possible to go to the funeral—that is, of course, if the Roundheads leave us in peace.'

'Let me go, too, Charles.'

'Yes, love; and we will have a stone put up to his memory, with this inscription after his name:—"What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"'

'Yes, yes,' acquiesced Blanche. They could not speak of their own wedding that night, for the shadow of death seemed over all things.

But for all that—the Roundheads not venturing to attack Cefn Mably again—they were married quietly within a couple of months of the siege; and Lady Jane went into the Dower House at Maes-y-bryn, with three of her daughters, to leave the family mansion to her son and his wife.

Cecily, however, remained in her old home, for Blanche, knowing how Sir Nicholas's 'Wild Bird' loved her father's house, every corner of which seemed to speak to her of him, and how uncongenial to her was the quiet life filled with sedentary

occupations of her sisters, insisted upon her staying.

Gwen was never forgotten. In the church of Maes-y-bryn a tablet was put up to her memory, with her name, the date of her death, and the verse, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'

The body of Sir Nicholas was recovered, and placed in the family vault, under the family motto, 'God, and His grace.'

Dying, death, and burying were more to the fore in those days than marrying or giving in marriage; but that was because War, the prolific parent of these grievous sorrows, was devastating the land.

And when, years afterwards, in peace and prosperity, Blanche told her children of the perils and adventures through which she and their father had passed, they listened wonderingly and in awe. The true story which they most loved to hear was about Gwen Jones, their mother's devoted maid, and how her love taught her to find the way to her mistress's side when she was a captive in Chepstow Castle, and that the same love, grown greater, caused her to lay down her life in order to save that of her mistress.

And then one day, when Blanche had been telling all this over again to her children, Cecily, who was sitting near in a wide window-seat, looked up quietly. 'Blanche, dear,' she said, 'you have

always been more religious than I, and more prayerful, but I should like to ask one thing. Do you think the Lord Jesus gave Himself in living as well as in dying for us?'

'Yes, certainly He did,' Blanche answered, readily.

'I think,' Cecily continued, with a sigh, 'it is harder to live for a cause than to die for it. One feels that it is glorious to give up one's life in an ecstasy of enthusiasm; but living is such a slow process—there are so many tedious and lonely hours when one thinks and thinks——' She choked a little, and broke off abruptly.

'Run away to nurse,' Blanche said to her children, sending them all off, and coming to sit by Cecily on the wide window-seat.

'Dear,' she said, when they were alone, 'I feel for you immensely; but you must understand it is not for us to choose our work. The Captain of our Salvation knows what He is doing when He bids one die, and another live for Him. We have only to obey, you know, just to obey.'

'That is what dear father said to me long ago. "We each have to obey," he said; and when I said, rebelliously, that I liked not the word, and liked not to do it, he said I was quite in the wrong, and that God did not send us into the world to do as we liked.'

Cecily paused a moment or two, to overcome the

emotion caused by the thought of her father, and then continued, 'It seems that I have not yet learned even that one lesson. I am bungling at it still——' She stopped short, in miserable discomfiture.

'Perhaps, dear, you are trying only in your own strength,' suggested Blanche, who had long wished that Sir Nicholas's Wild Bird might cease to beat her wings against the cage of circumstances, and learn to be reconciled with her lot.

'Well, if I am, what then?' demanded Cecily. 'I could not take some of your strange, sweet strength of character if I would, though I have often longed for it. No; we each have to stand alone, with our own powers.'

'Then where does grace come in?' asked Blanche. 'What do the words "His grace" mean in your motto?'

'I thought always that they meant God's favours.'

''Tis so, and more. For favour implies His gracious Divine influence or help; in other words, the influence of the Holy Spirit, through Whom alone we can think and pray to Him aright.'

Cecily was silent a few minutes, as her thoughts were busy with the past. 'That's what I have always missed!' she exclaimed, suddenly, looking up. 'Gwen had it, or she could not have prayed so fervently the believing prayers which always

brought an answer, until she obtained the wish of her heart and did a great, splendid act of heroism. And you have it, Blanche, or you could not be what you are. But I have been left out; God has given no grace to me!' Her tones were unutterably sad.

'Without His grace you would not even want it,' Blanche said, tenderly. 'So you see He has given you some grace, and He will give you more and more, if you ask for it. Pray for the Holy Spirit, dearest, pray as you never prayed before, and He will give Him, for our Lord promised that our Heavenly Father would give the Holy Spirit to them that asked Him.'

'I will ask,' Cecily said. 'I will ask night and day, until my prayer is answered.' She went away then silently to her room.

From that day there was a change in Cecily. No longer was she unsatisfied and unhappy, beating against the bars of her cage in revolt that was vain and futile. A new spirit animated her whole being: submitting to the inevitable with sweet grace, she sought to bear the burden of her life bravely and even with cheerfulness; and then, an unexpected yet natural consequence followed, the burden vanished and her life became most useful, beautiful, and joyous.

The poor in Maes-y-bryn, and indeed for miles around, learnt to love and reverence the Angel of Cefn Mably, as they called her; whilst all who

came in contact with her, and especially her relatives, came to think that there was no one in the world like Cecily in trouble or in joy.

As for Sir Charles Kemeys, he could never please his children more than when he showed them the words 'God, and His grace,' written above the family vault, to which Sir Nicholas's remains had been brought from Chepstow, and told them that he was called 'The Lion of Glamorgan,' and that he died, as he lived, for God and the King.

Sir Charles always ended with the words, 'A Kemeys could not do otherwise.' And then the little Kemeyses who listened determined that they too would be faithful, sincere, brave and loyal, as a Kemeys should be, and indeed as every true-hearted man and woman cannot fail to be, when they remember that a 'Christian cannot do otherwise.'

THE END

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